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ON THE SOUNDTRACK

THE SOUND OF SILENTS

BY NORMAN KING

WE KNOW THAT silent cinema was never actually silent – or hardly ever. The great movie palaces had large permanent orchestras with their own prestigious musical directors. Local cinemas might not be able to afford such lavishness but they too would have at least a small ensemble of musicians. And so on down the ‘social’ scale to the roadshow with its travelling pianist, a necessary part of the performance even, as *The Picture Show Man* reminds us, in the Australian outback. We know quite a lot too about what kind of music was played. Special scores for screenings of blockbusters like *Birth of a Nation* in the major cities; a standard repertoire of popular classics in more downmarket cinemas; whatever the pianist could manage elsewhere. Mood music basically, making the images more atmospheric, intensifying the emotional impact, heightening the drama, underscoring the climaxes, providing a sense of complicity. It was there to anticipate, confirm and reinforce. If the musical director of the Tivoli or the Empire didn’t like the score sent along with the film, or thought his orchestra couldn’t manage it, he was at liberty to substitute something else that he thought would be suitable and, as cinema programmes show, he frequently did.

Music was, then, an essential ingredient of the cinema experience. But if sound is considered only on this level, it becomes merely an adjunct, subordinate to the images it was supposed to fit. What I want to do here, using the films of Abel Gance as examples, is try to shift the terms of reference, to examine sound as one of the major determinants in silent cinema.

Gance, it could be argued, is an exception, a privileged film-maker given a relatively free hand and copious resources by producers who allowed him to experiment with new techniques. Certainly he was more inventive than most of his contemporaries and was able to draw on the expertise of a remarkably skilled team of technicians. But if, by the early 1920s, Gance was acknowledged as the great master of French cinema, it was not just as innovator but as film-maker who blurred the distinction between the ‘artistic’ and the ‘popular’, supplying pictures that were

both prestigious *and* profitable. Because both factors were vitally important to a French industry struggling at the same time for recognition and survival, his films were heavily promoted and avidly discussed, with the result that there is a mass of documentation charting the progress of his more ambitious projects through from production to exhibition. And his work was at the centre of a debate about the function of cinema that frequently takes the equation of sound and image as reference point. It is for these reasons, plus the existence of a substantial archive, that Gance's films open out the possibility of a new approach to the sound of silents, the investigation not just of music but of speech and special effects as an integral part of film production and exhibition long before the arrival of the talkies.

Noel Burch¹ has demonstrated that from the beginning cinema aspired to have a 'voice' as well as an image. At first it was the image that seemed to be the appendage—to the phonograph—and attempts to synchronise sound and image began with Edison. Léon Gaumont's Chronophone², a system that used a rheostat to synchronise the speed of a projector with that of a gramophone, was introduced in 1902 and by 1912 he had produced several hundred Phono-Scenes, mostly popular songs or extracts from operas and ballets³. Sound effects were common in fairground performances, and in cinemas actors would sometimes be concealed behind the screen, speaking in synchrony with the characters in the film. More important, in Burch's opinion, was the Lecturer who would explain and comment on the action, constructing a continuity out of a fragmentary narrative and indicating how the audience should respond.

Burch suggests that the Lecturer disappeared around 1912-1914 with the arrival of continuity filming, but I would suggest that he continued in existence for rather longer, at least in rural areas where it was commonplace for the travelling projectionist to *present* his films. I did in fact encounter a survival of this tradition in a Provençal country town as recently as 1981. It was an open air screening of silent films presented by an old man who had spent much of his life touring the local villages with a portable projector. There was no music, just live voice-overs that were amazingly eloquent.

Although they are hard to document, there seem to have been various other attempts during the 1920s to accompany silent films with spoken commentaries. There is, for example, a reference in Elie Faure's correspondence to a *commentaire* he was asked to write for Gance's *Napoleon*⁴, though nothing ever came of it, and there are other equally elusive references to live speech in the Gance archive, including references to the tonality of voice required in *Napoleon*.

By this stage, the use of sound in the studio was already a well-established practice. For big-budget films, directors could insist on a permanent ensemble of musicians to establish the mood for the actors. For cheaper pictures, there might be just one or two instruments, a violin or a piano for example, or simply a gramophone. This was so much taken for granted that journalists invited to visit the studio didn't usually bother to comment on it unless something untoward happened.

¹ Most recently at the 'Putting Narrative in Place' weekend school, Derby, December 10-12, 1982. See also 'How We Got into Pictures: Notes accompanying Correction Please', *Afterimage*, 8-9, 1981, pp 24-38.

² For details see Brian Coe, *The History of Movie Photography*, London, Ash and Grant, 1981, p 95.

³ Until 1907 they were all directed by Alice Guy. See Alice Guy, *Mémoires d'une pionnière du cinéma*, Paris, Denoël/Gonthier, 1976.

⁴ Elie Faure, *Oeuvres complètes*, Yves Lévy (ed), Paris, Pauvert, 1964, III, pp 1060-1061 (letter dated May 13, 1926).

⁵ *Cinéma-Ciné pour tous*, December 15, 1923, pp 9-10.

⁶ *Comoedia*, December 31, 1922, p 4

⁷ *Cahiers du cinéma*, 202, 1968, p 13.

⁸ Cinémathèque française.

One such example is Marianne Alby's account⁵ of the filming of *Au secours*, a comedy Gance made with Max Linder in 1923. Gina Palerme, the female lead, is supposed to be scared out of her wits by a masked man who comes into her bedroom. Filming of the scene begins well enough but is interrupted by a lighting problem. When shooting does eventually restart, Gina asks for *the music*, expecting *Danse macabre*. What she gets is an aria from *Tosca*. The director shouts instructions, there's the noise of the cameras and the inappropriate scratchy record of an operatic soprano. When Gina screams, it's as much to drown out all this extraneous din as to make her performance look convincing.

In the cinemas, too, music, speech and sound effects were becoming commonplace. They were part of film's aspiration to be real. Reviewing the first screening of *La roue* in December 1922, Emile Vuillermoz reports that there were gasps of enthusiasm when the sound of 'real' jets of steam were produced in synchrony with the images of a railway engine, though he goes on to admit that he would prefer there just to be music (on which he doesn't find it necessary to comment).⁶ And when *La roue* was put out on release in Paris early in 1923, it was preceded in the programme by 'an exclusive innovation', the Gaumont Chronographe – successor to the Chronophone – representing a talking picture, *Tombouc-tou la mystérieuse*, an illustrated lecture by Louis Forest with a commentary by M Saint-Yves. Around the same time there were experiments of a different kind, like those of Lordier who would stand in the wings singing one of his songs while on the screen there would be images to illustrate it. And singers would sometimes appear on stage, reproducing what was in the image.

Sound had, though, a more determinant effect on the image that the examples quoted so far might suggest. It wasn't just a question of appropriate music, convincing sound effects or voices that made the image seem more immediate. Camille Saint-Saens had already conferred musical respectability on the cinema by agreeing to compose for it, just as Sarah Bernhardt had established 'theatrical' credence by performing in front of the camera. Cinema, in its ambition to become the Art Form of the Twentieth Century and in its attempts to distance itself from the novelistic, saw music as a founding instance.

In *La dixième symphonie*, written and directed by Gance in 1917 but not released until November 1918, music is central. The film is about the composing of a symphony that is performed in the movie theatre, and at its high point the music takes precedence over the image.

Examining Gance's work in the context of the avant-garde, Henri Langlois sees *La dixième symphonie* as his first masterpiece.⁷ It is basically, though, a conventional melodrama. Enric Damor, a gifted composer, suspects his wife of having an affair with the man her step-daughter wants to marry (she is in fact being blackmailed by him). But this breakdown of family relationships provides a new source of inspiration – art produced through suffering – his tenth symphony, which he performs on the piano for an invited audience of friends and admirers.

A working note dated August 1917⁸ suggests that Gance initially

planned to use recorded sound but instead *La dixième symphonie* became one of the first feature films to have a specially commissioned symphonic score, composed by Michel-Maurice Lévy. The orchestra in the cinema thus reproduces what is supposedly being played within the film. The evident disparity here, between the piano in the image and the orchestral sound in the cinema, is aggravated by the fact that many cinema orchestras could not cope with a symphonic score (the only programmes that I have seen do not in fact mention Lévy's music at all, suggesting that musical directors substituted something easier to play). The disparity is quickly effaced, however, because what we actually see on the screen is less the performance of the symphony than a series of images that illustrate it. There are locating shots of Damor playing and of the entranced listeners, but the sequence consists principally of tinted images of a ballet dancer superimposed on an idyllic garden setting with a frieze of dancers, flowers and bunches of grapes at the top and bottom of the frame. The visual is thus an interpretation of the musical, breaking out from the narrative in which it is held. More precisely, music ceases to be simply the subject-matter of the film, it generates images that are presented as the visual *équivalent* of the musical.

The importance of *La dixième symphonie* is that it achieved within mainstream cinema what was to become one of the great preoccupations of the avant garde, the liberation of the image from the narrative and the theatrical. It was a move towards non-narrative form, towards the expressive and the rhythmical. The title itself is significant here. Damor is assimilated to Beethoven by superimpressions but his composition is also subsumed into the film as extension of the Ninth. After the Choral, the Visual. The supreme orchestrator is not the composer but the director: the first image is of Damor with the death mask of Beethoven in superimpression but the final one is of Abel Gance taking a bow, thanking the audience for their appreciation.

La dixième symphonie illustrates, then, the extent to which cinema in its aspiration to be recognised as a popular *art* form was looking towards music as model and guarantee. They seemed to have a similar project, using rhythm, harmony and tonal contrast as the basis of an appeal to feeling. Lyric poetry could also provide a parallel since it, too, played on the intuitive, but music seemed more appropriate and was more distanced from the literary. For Gance and many of his contemporaries in France, it opened out the possibility of a radically new theory of what cinema might become.

The idea of the symphonic was in fact to have an immense importance in French attempts to establish an aesthetics of film. The definition of cinema as 'the music of light', attributed to Gance but also claimed by several others, including Emile Vuillermoz and Elie Faure, became an accepted term in writings about film in the early 1920s. And for all its neat oversimplifications, Henri Langlois' description of Germaine Dulac remains a pertinent characterisation of a dominant impressionist tendency: 'She sees music, she thinks music, she always considers film not as a fresco but as a symphony of images in which each shot, through

⁹ *Cahiers du cinéma*, 202, 1968, p 14.

¹⁰ On this issue see David Bordwell, 'The Musical Analogy', *Yale French Studies*, 60, 1980, pp 141-156.

¹¹ Notably in 'Le cinéma de demain', *Conférenci*, 23, 1928, pp 197-209.

¹² Abel Gance, *Prisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1930, pp 175-176.

¹³ Gance to Henri Langlois, November 23, 1975 (Centre national de la cinématographie).

¹⁴ Roger Lion, 'Un grand artiste français: Abel Gance', *Filma*, May 15, 1920, pp 5-8.

¹⁵ Gance to René Jeanne, October 14 1920 (Cinémathèque française).

its tonality and length, has the same value as a sound. She plays on montage as she would play the piano.⁹ As long as one doesn't eliminate poetry and dance, this view could be applied to most of the French avant-garde, from Léger to René Clair, Jean Epstein and Blaise Cendrars. What they all have in common is their reference to Gance as-point of origin, especially to *La roue* which seemed to prove that cinema even in a proletarian setting and addressed to a popular audience was an art for the future. It had elevated cinema incontrovertibly to the status and dignity of music. This may seem to be an argument in favour of the 'musical analogy'¹⁰ and indeed Gance continued to insist through to the late 1920s¹¹ that cinema had to equate itself with music, to become a visual orchestra, performing symphonies in time and space. But music was not simply an analogy, it was, as *La roue* further exemplifies, a determinant of the image, providing a basis for tonality, movement within the frame and cutting between frames, even though in this instance the 'source' of the music is not present in the image.

From its conception, *La roue* was mapped out in terms of musical metaphors. It was to be a symphony in black and white or, more precisely, 'a white symphony following on from a black symphony'¹². A first part set in the soot and smoke of marshalling yards and railway engines, a second set high up in the Alps – contrasting worlds made for the cinema. Much later Gance described the film as a poem in which each image counts, like a note in music¹³, echoing Langlois' comments on Dulac. But as in *La dixième symphonie*, music had a definite function within the film. His project, she declared in a 1920 interview, was 'to paint a visual opera', to establish a direct relationship between the vibrations of sound and light, to unite photography and Rachmaninov.¹⁴ Like *La dixième symphonie* it was a melodrama, not the 'cathedral of light' he aspired to construct but a film that would be understood by a popular audience and which would at the same time have universal significance. The hero is an engine-driver called Sisif (Sisyphus), but within this proletarian actualisation of myth, music takes on a new function. It isn't something that is composed and performed within a narrative from which it then escapes. Music and image are conceived together.

Two examples may help to clarify. In the closing sequence, the finale of the white symphony, Sisif and his adopted daughter Norma are at last reconciled. Norma is invited by the mountain guides to join in their annual celebration and as they dance higher and higher up the mountain above the snow-line they gradually merge into a harmony with nature. Sisif, blinded by a railway accident, sits facing the window 'listening' and as he dies achieves the same harmony. Shot 13,000 feet up in the Alps in the late autumn of 1920, this was an extraordinary piece of location filming. But Gance was particularly insistent on its musicality, on the construction of a filmic rhythm that exactly matched *Anitra's Dance*.¹⁵ Similarly, in the opening sequence of *J'accuse* (1917-1919), he had used the Farandole from Bizet's *L'Arlésienne* as the basis for a village celebration, knowing that the increasing tempo and insistent rhythm of dancing and editing could be exactly matched by the performance of the same piece of music in the theatre.



Top, the dance of the mountain guides intercut with (below) the death of the engine-driver Sisif in *La roue*.

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Here, the music pre-exists an image which appropriates and exceeds it. In the other example music provides a concept of rhythm that underpins one of cinema's most dynamic and historically significant innovations during the early 1920s, accelerated montage. Sisif is driving the train that is taking Norma to the city where she is to be married off against her better judgment to Hersan, the effete capitalist villain. And Sisif has resolved to crash the train to kill himself and Norma. Like most of Gance's rapid montage sequences, it begins slowly, gradually builds up to a crescendo with cutting that imitates musical notation and reaches a 'paroxysm' of split-second shots before returning to the long takes and composition in depth of narrative. At the climax, the individual images are no longer clearly perceptible, there is only a compelling sense of rhythm.

This attempt to construct a visual equivalent of sound provoked one of the great pitched battles in film history. *La roue* was either an outrage, a

¹⁶*La foi et les montagnes*, Paris, Paul Montel, 1959, pp 245-246.

¹⁷*Comoedia*, December 31, 1922, p 4.

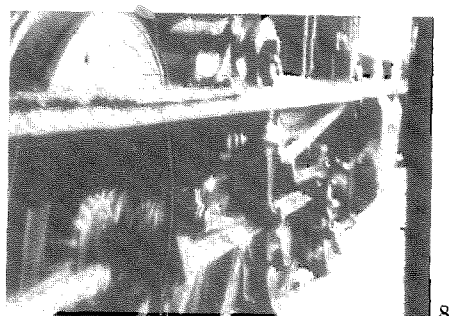
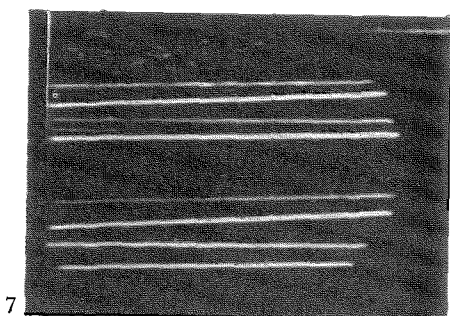
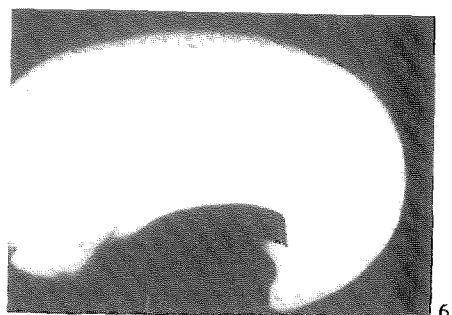
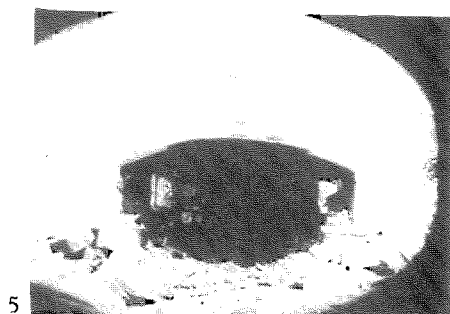
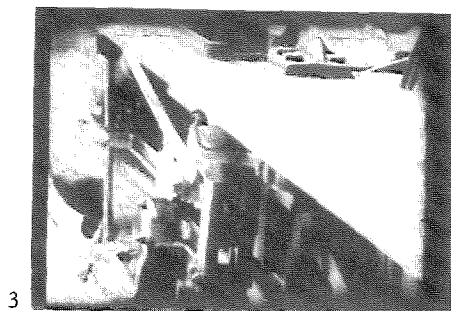
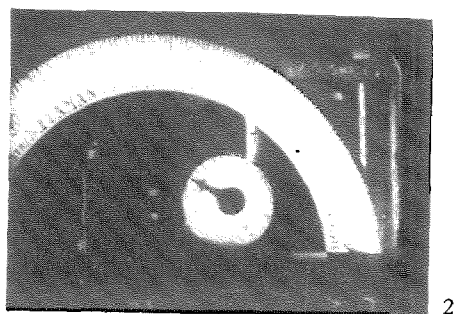
¹⁸Letters of Gance and Honegger, December 1927 (Cinémathèque française).

bombastic, overblown and overlong piece of triviality or the first cinematic *œuvre* that demonstrated what the new art might become. Writing about the first performance nearly 40 years after the event, the film director Henri Fescourt remembers it as a unique experience, a miraculous fusion of sound and image: 'Thanks to the marrying of visual and aural rhythms each coinciding with the other, you had the impression that the noise was coming at you from the image. It was not at all music that tried to imitate but a music that suggested, that imposed on the ear the same effect as the impending catastrophe imposed on the nerves. The commotion of sound translated the turmoil, the soil of the locomotive into heart-rending notes, percussive explosions, breathless cadences. The image-sound complex created a sensation of total unity.'¹⁶ Fescourt, in his recollection, embroiders on the memory of an overall effect, but contemporary critics were similarly impressed. For Émile Vuillermoz, who was a musician as well as a prolific writer on cinema, *La roue* was the exemplification of the music of images, moving through from a slow indolent melody to a scherzo with abrupt modulations, fugal entries, leitmotifs, and a development into polyphony and polytonality. That, for him, was the mapping out of the cinema of the future.¹⁷

Fescourt is apparently mistaken in his recollections when he describes in detail the effect produced at the first screening of *La roue* by Arthur Honegger's abrasive score, and many critics (including myself) have followed him in supposing that Honegger supplied music for the whole film – programmes for the Paris release indicate that the original music was 'borrowed' from Saint-Saens, Fauré, Mendelssohn, Massenet and other composers. But Honegger did write special music for the rapid montage sequences and this was subsequently performed as an independent orchestral piece that has entered the repertoire as *Pacific 231*. In fact music and image become symbiotic here. Montage in *La roue* was based on musical notation which was then taken over by Honegger in music that matched the rhythm of the images.

Pacific 231 later provided the basis for a new sequence of images in a film made by Alexander Laszlo and released in Berlin in 1927. Hearing about this, Gance protested vehemently, claiming that he himself was planning to make a polyvision film that would be a new visualisation of the same music, an essay in visual counterpoint. Like many of Gance's projects of the late 1920s, the film was never made but there is correspondence in his archive negotiating with the Paris-Orleans railway company for the use of tracks and locomotives.¹⁸

Honegger also wrote scores for *Napoleon* and for *La fin du monde*, Gance's first sound picture. The results were not an unmitigated success since the composer had to work quickly and it was not always easy to match the stark modernism of the music to the residual romanticism of the image. For *Napoleon* the difficulties were insurmountable since Honegger had to write music for a film that kept changing its length (from, at the extreme, 3700 to 11000 metres) and had to blend original themes in with settings of Revolutionary songs dictated by the screen-



Frame stills from a rapid montage sequence in *La roue* for which Honegger wrote *Pacific 231*.

¹⁹*L'humanité*, May 1, 1927.

²⁰And in Léon Moussinac's literary adaptation of the screenplay, Paris, *La lampe merveilleuse*, 1922.

play. The result, Moussinac states, was a mish-mash.¹⁹ It was, even so, a claim staked out by cinema to be *modern* too, as original as the *Groupe des Six* but more accessible to the popular imagination.

So far I have looked mostly at music and want now to address the issue of speech. Although for many critics silent cinema seemed to have reached its peak in those films of Chaplin in which speech was superfluous, we have seen that the spoken word was a central preoccupation from very early on. Over and above the experiments with recorded sound it is clear that implicit speech was already an accepted convention in European cinema by the early 1920s, with scripted dialogues even though these might not be reproduced in inter-titles. In Germaine Dulac's *La souriante Madame Beudet*, for example, there is a long telephone conversation with frequent close-ups of the principal actress who is clearly speaking her lines. There are very few inter-titles and only a lip-reader would be able to make out exactly what she is saying. Yet the effect is a very marked one, shifting the acting style away from the exaggeratedly gestural towards the naturalistic.

Gance occasionally used scripted dialogues even in some of his very early films, but it is in *J'accuse*, made during the later stages of the Great War and released in 1919, that a written text becomes particularly prominent. The central character, Jean Diaz, is a poet who at various moments declaims one of his compositions. We don't know what this film originally looked like since only a re-cut and shortened version dating from 1922 seems to have survived. In it, Diaz is clearly speaking the lines of the poem but we see only fragments of his declamation. The complete text appears in the intertitles.²⁰ The same thing happens in *La roue* when, in an imagined sequence, Elie uses a poem (written, like the one in *J'accuse*, by Gance) to declare his love for Norma. Again, the complete version of the film is lost and in the prints that survive the text of the poem is usually given in the intertitles. But it is clear that voice was already an important element of film production, that actors spoke scripted lines even though these might never be heard, or indeed seen, in the cinema, except perhaps at special screenings about which we have very little information.

There is one film, however, that is so well documented that we can establish exactly how sound—music, dialogue and declamation—was used during filming and performance: the 1927 *Napoleon*. But first a note of caution: when critics enthused about Gance's success in dubbing voices on to silent footage for the 1971 *Bonaparte et la Révolution*, they were often referring without realising it to sound sequences filmed with the original actors for the 1935 sonorised version. Even so, it is clear that speech was of paramount importance in the silent version and one of the advantages of the 1935 re-edit is that it includes dialogue sequences that were cut from the silent distribution prints to make way for intertitles. One example from the closing stages of the film demonstrates how different it was when it was first screened at the Paris Opera in April 1927. After arriving at the Albenga encampment and restoring order, Bonaparte harangues the Army of Italy promising the spoils of war,

honour and glory. Even in the restored print there are only fragments of the speech interrupted by titles. But at the Opera these lines were declaimed by an actor. The speech was present in its entirety in the image and in the theatre, producing a completely different engagement from the one we now experience. And as the army marched off in the final triptychs, the rhythm of the images exactly matched that of 'Auprès de ma blonde', sung by the soldiers within the film and by the chorus in the theatre.

A further example from *Napoleon* draws together the points made so far about music and voice. The sequence is a purely fictional representation of how the Marseillaise came to be adopted by the Parisian Revolutionaries. Like other montage sequences, it begins quite slowly. We are at a political meeting in 1792 at the former Cordeliers monastery. While Robespierre, Marat and Danton are in dispute about principles and tactics, a massive crowd waits in the church for the meeting to begin. A man begins to distribute a song, which is of course Rouget de l'Isle's *Chant du départ*, soon to be known as *La Marseillaise*. Danton's secretary, Camille Desmoulins, reads a copy, realises the song's potential importance for the Revolution and persuades Danton to look at it. Abandoning the speech he was going to make, Danton takes Rouget de l'Isle up into the pulpit to teach the song to the crowd. It is greeted by an outburst of cheers and applause and, as the enthusiasm mounts, the rhythm of the cutting gradually increases, culminating in a montage of single frame close-ups of people singing and the superimposition of an animated tableau of the Marseillaise copied from Rude's sculpture on the Arc de Triomphe.

It's a remarkable sequence in that its rhythmic patterns are precisely structured on music, with a climax that corresponds in the acceleration of the cutting to the musical crescendo and prolonged final chord. It was



Danton teaches *La Marseillaise* to the people in *Napoleon*.

²¹A film about the making of *Napoleon*, released in 1928.

²²Jean Arroy, *En tournant 'Napoléon' avec Abel Gance*, Paris, La renaissance du livre, 1927.

²³Emile Vuillermoz, 'La machine à explorer le temps', *L'impartial français*, March 19, 1926.

also a laborious process with an effect Gance was particularly proud of. Just to edit 94 shots into 15 seconds of accelerated montage had, he claimed in *Autour de Napoléon*²¹, involved two weeks of intensive work – in addition to the time spent shooting dozens of close-ups of individual singers in the studio. But it depended for its effect on an exact synchrony of image and sound, and to achieve this the conductor was provided with a mechanism for controlling the speed of projection, an interesting example of sound given priority over the image. The need for such precise synchrony always caused problems and the attempt was probably abandoned by provincial cinema musical directors just as it was by Gance in the 1935 sound version and by Carl Davis in the Thames presentation of Kevin Brownlow's reconstruction on Channel 4. And yet that synchrony is an essential part of the experience. The 1971 *Bonaparte et la Révolution* clearly demonstrates that, in spite of a soundtrack that is frequently excessive. The effect of live sound was, according to contemporary critics, electrifying.

What makes this sequence particularly useful for the study of sound in silent cinema is that there are very detailed accounts of how it was filmed and performed. For the shooting Gance had recruited workers on strike from a neighbouring car factory to supplement the usual supply of extras. To establish the mood he went up into the pulpit and announced: 'I am going to try out a new technique. It's quite complex and I'm going to have to ask you to make a special effort that you'll be able to manage if you apply yourselves to it heart and soul. I want you to sing the Marseillaise twelve times in a continuous crescendo.' The result, according to one of Gance's assistants, was a resounding cheer, a unique phenomenon in studio filming.²² Gance had also taken other precautions to ensure the desired result. In addition to the permanent ensemble of musicians, he had hired drummers and trumpet players. He also had the opera singer Koubitsky (playing Danton) to lead the singing along with another singer, Maryse Damia (the animated Marseillaise in the superimpressions). When it was all over, there was more spontaneous cheering and, as one witness said, if Gance had ordered his Thousand to storm the National Assembly, they would have obeyed without question.²³

Music and voice are so clearly integrated here into the production process that the sequence would have been inconceivable without them. Rhythmical montage transformed it radically but its impact derives initially from a lack of simulation. Verisimilitude in this instance means a cast completely caught up in the fiction it is acting out.

Since the sound was of course not recorded, it is important to note how the silent images were 'interpreted' in performance. At the Opera premiere there was a brass band as well as an orchestra, plus a chorus whose professionalism must have jarred with the images of Sans-culottes struggling to learn the notes of their future national anthem. In addition, there was Koubitsky up on the stage, synchronising with his own image in the film (provincial cinemas also used soloists for this sequence). This may seem to be in complete contradiction to the attempt to achieve verisimilitude within the image, but it was in fact an interpellation of the

audience, casting them in the same role as the revolutionary strikers, inviting them to share in their enthusiasm. At the Opera premiere the distinguished audience just cheered, but less pretentious spectators did join in the singing. The elaborate press-book prepared by Jean Arroy for distribution to cinema managers didn't just specify how the music should be played and the need for a chorus, it also included the words of the Marseillaise so that they could be distributed to the audience. And it spelled out which verses of other revolutionary songs should be sung at other moments.

Ultimately it was for the audience to recreate the film's atmosphere through its own participation, and this is frequently what happened. To quote just one example from the numerous letters preserved in the Gance archive describing a screening of *Napoleon* in a small provincial town in the Vaucluse: 'When at the Assembly Rouget de l'Isle sings the Marseillaise for the first time and the orchestra played our national anthem with great vigour, many people rose to their feet and sang . . . and the old men wept.'²⁴ The actual sound might not literally correspond to what it had been in the studio but the image necessitated a similar sound and a similar response.

In effect, this sequence, through its combination of image and live sound operates a dramatic shift in patterns of identification. We do not look towards Danton or Bonaparte as sources of knowledge (though there are looks of approval within the image to guide us). We are positioned with regard to an experience, a supposedly historical one recreated in the studio and then actualised. Like the extras we are called upon to enter into that experience.

This, it seems to me, is something specific to the sound of silent cinema. In the sonorised version the impact is quite different. It's still exciting and there is Henri Verdun's vibrant score. But we are also more distanced. Because the film *contains* the sound and the image, all the dynamism is up there on the screen and doesn't ultimately concern us directly. In the silent version the sound is present, provoking a response to *it*, and through it a different relation to the image, a participation, an engagement with the film. The cheering and applause is as much the audience celebrating its own experience as an appreciation of visual effects. *Napoleon* and the Marseillaise sequence may indeed be exceptions but only to the extent that they exemplify what silent cinema, in contrast to the early talkies, aspired to be through an equation of production and performance.

This emphasis on participation in a performance and on celebration suggests a need for the careful examination of the ideological effects of the sound silents. Although we might be tempted to view the experimentation with sound in the Marseillaise sequence as radical in terms of accepted film practices, for example through its changing of the relationship between spectator and spectacle, it is politically closer to the reactionary in its privileging of feeling and intuition. It may challenge received conventions of realism but in its attempt to produce a collective enthusiasm it seeks to construct a unified spectator and a united

²⁴René Bonnaventure
to Gance,
September 1929
(Institut des hautes
études
cinématographiques).

audience summoned to respond dynamically and uncritically, to collapse identity into the experience of the actual. That, in 1927, could be seen as an endorsement of authoritarianism, as indeed it was by Moussinac and Vuillermoz who, in spite of divergent political positions (Moussinac was a marxist, Vuillermoz an establishment critic), both condemned the film's proto-fascist tendencies even though they admired its innovations. The most ardent defenders of *Napoleon* were in fact members of the patriotic right who not surprisingly argued that politics was an irrelevance for the evaluation of art. This, however, is only a single example and one which is relatively easy to document and contextualise. Although the excitement, cheers and applause that greeted the fusion of sound and image in *La roue* may suggest that the effect on the audience was similar, a great deal of empirical research will have to be done for a more extensive study of ideological effectivity to be possible.

Returning, then, to the empirical, I want to end with some remarks on the use of sound during the final moments of the silent era, taking as example the screenplay of *Sainte-Hélène*²⁵, written by Gance in the winter of 1927-1928.

Sainte-Hélène was originally intended to be the last episode in a cycle of six films covering the whole of Napoleon's career but it was given priority because of the difficulty of financing the intervening films. In the event, Gance was unable to obtain sufficient backing in France even for a single sequel and the script was sold to a German producer who passed it to Lupu Pick to adapt and direct.

The important point about Gance's original screenplay is the complex and extremely detailed way the use of sound was mapped out at the drafting stage. Sound, in what was still to be a 'silent' film was not an afterthought or an adjunct, it is expressly designated in the script as an integral part of the production.

Much attention is paid to sound effects, cannon fire, thunder, ocean waves. And once again there was to be an exact matching of sound and image. For one sequence, Gance specifies that the movement and dynamic theme have to be the Scherzo before the final Allegro in Beethoven's Fifth. And for the death scene, he notes even more specifically: 'The rhythm and theme of the heroic march at the end of the Ninth Symphony, on the screen and in the orchestra pit. A wave of power and joy that sings. Suddenly an absolute silence for the ear and the eye.' Then there is a curious reference to a 'speaker' who quotes a long text by Chateaubriand about Napoleon's funeral that the images must precisely match. And, in the final moments, a play on silence, the sound of the waves and the climactic music—Beethoven, Berlioz and Revolutionary songs. What we have, then, is an idea of sound that is quite distinct from that which was already being used in the early talkies. Sound determines but does not restrict. The image also 'sings'.

To sum up, I want to argue that sound in the silent cinema has to be attended to much more carefully than it usually has been. Music was more than just a convenient analogy, and research of the kind pioneered by Noel Burch has to be extended and filled out. The numerous well-

documented studies of cinema's attempts to incorporate recorded sound may be valuable contributions to the history of film technology but they tend to invite teleological modes of analysis, as if the story of early cinema was one of a gradual progression towards *The Jazz Singer* and its more sophisticated successors. Sound functioned *differently* during the silent era. It supplied a set of credentials and a guarantee of respectability. It provided a theoretical basis for techniques like rhythmical montage. Essentially it produced effects in the cinema that recorded sound could not, a sense of immediacy and participation. Live sound actualised the image and, merging with it, emphasised the presentness of the performance and of the audience. It is from that play of interpellation and positioning—the placing of the spectator within an immediate experience—that 'silent' cinema derived much of its potency.²⁶

²⁶ An earlier version of this article was presented at the SEFT Sound Cinema weekend, Triangle Arts Centre, Birmingham, October 29-30, 1983.

ABEL GANCE

by Norman King

Few people had heard of Abel Gance until Kevin Brownlow's restored version of *Napoleon* received its premiere. Overnight Gance's reputation was re-established. Yet despite the critical acclaim which followed, there has been little attempt to come to terms with the true nature of Gance's contribution to cinema.

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TOWARDS A SEMIOTICS OF THE TRANSITION TO SOUND: SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL CODES

BY NANCY WOOD

¹ Klaus Wyborny, 'Random Notes on the Conventional Narrative Film', *Afterimage* 8/9, Spring 1981, p 114, 115.

² This article is a modified extract from Nancy Wood, *Text and Spectator in the Period of the Transition to Sound*, a Ph.D. thesis for the Film Studies Department, University of Kent, Canterbury 1983. Some of the arguments were presented at the SEFT Sound Cinema weekend, Triangle Arts Centre, Birmingham, October 29-30, 1983.

³ Tamar Lane, *The New Technique of Screen Writing: A Practical Guide to the Writing and Marketing of Photoplays*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1936, p 5.

*The main function of narrative grammar is to produce a natural connection between units of time and space not naturally connected. The yardstick for the naturalness of such a grammatical bond is the emergence of a space-time structure which is not internally contradictory at first sight. This is to say that implicit in every element of the emerging space-time structure is the virtual imprint of a geographical and a temporal co-ordinate, and these co-ordinates must not be contradictory. . . . Films which permit unambiguous space-time constructions, without the synthetic element of their process of production being apparent in them at first glance, are felt to be particularly realistic.*¹

THIS OBSERVATION, made in the course of commenting upon the consolidation of narrative illusion in early silent cinema, could equally well stand for one of the central dilemmas posed by the introduction of sound.² Undoubtedly, the most difficult task confronting the early Hollywood sound film was the re-consolidation of a 'space-time structure' which would be deemed realistic, however differently this spatial and temporal realism might have to be achieved. Compared to its silent counterpart, the talking cinema was considered an 'inflexible institution'³, above all because certain latitudes in spatial and temporal construction available to late silent narratives were not permitted the early sound film. It was as if the introduction of sound had caused an immediate 'densening' or 'thickening' of the more permeable spatio-temporal field of the silent film, thereby requiring more concrete and exacting definitions of the spatial and temporal dimensions.

This felt need to tighten the spatio-temporal structure of the early sound film can only be understood with respect to the specific codes which articulated space and time relations in late silent narratives. Hollywood films of the late silent cinema employed intertitles in ways which largely reinforced a continuous narrative unfolding. Titles were used to condense or summarise narrative elements, to eclipse portions of narrative time, and to 'transport' the spectator to new narrative loca-

tions. However, despite the cohesive functions assumed by intertitles at the diegetic level, their status as a non-analogical, graphic code entailed a disruption of the linearity of the image track and its analogical support. François Albéra observes that the intertitle 'effects an interruption in the continuum of the image track... it creates a discontinuity in the analogical code by installing a message fragment drawn from an arbitrary code, *la langue*. This continuity is experienced as a violation of the integrity of the film (continuity, homogeneity, linear unfolding).'⁴

Dialogue titles displayed similar contradictory functions in relation to narrative linearity. Michel Marie has argued that '(in) a realist-representative perspective, dialogue titles were accepted to the extent that they were logically awaited; however they functioned precisely as substitutes for speech and in so doing only underlined its absence as a lack.'⁵ Moreover, Marie points out that the simple material fact of alternation between the visualised speaker and the intertitle suspended the narrative's seamless unfolding by virtue of its 'separation of the enounced from the moment of its enunciation'. According to Marie, '(speech) finds itself thereby decentred, expelled from its site of emission.'⁶

Although early sound films continued to use titles for the purposes of conveying spatial and temporal information among larger narrative units, the elimination of diegetic titles effecting temporal and spatial ellipses between smaller scenes, and within a scene itself required wholly new solutions. The early sound film sought transitional devices which would eliminate 'the explicit presentation of these space-time titles without the spectator losing his space-time orientation, so the film form moves formally to the system: SHOT: SHOT: SHOT: SHOT:... and in each shot there is a series of indications which mediate the spatial and temporal organisation between the shots.'⁷

At the level of scenic transitions, these 'indications' were carried out by reconstituted codes of punctuation/demarcation.⁸ Optical effects such as dissolves, fades and lap dissolves were noticeably restricted in their signifying possibilities by the early sound film and deployed primarily to convey temporal and spatial information. As Noël Burch has noted, the dissolve in late silent cinema 'rarely had any specific "meaning" and was hardly ever employed to indicate the passage of time. Because there were titles for that purpose, dissolves were not needed. For many years in the silent era, dissolves were used as a means of securing a "soft-transition" from a close-up to a long shot (or vice versa) within a single, perfectly continuous sequence.'⁹ Thus, as a form of shot transition within a scene, the dissolve in silent cinema often functioned as a paradigmatic alternative to the straight cut, for the purposes of scene dissection, or, occasionally, more strongly motivated by figural similarities between two shots. As a transitional device between scenes in late silent cinema, lap dissolves indicated spatial displacements, (to a lesser extent) temporal condensation, or both in the introduction of the oft-used memory flashback. In the early sound film, the use of lap dissolves was largely confined to scenic transitions and even here their meaning became increasingly pinned down to the passage of time. Finally, not only was the lap

⁴ François Albéra, 'Ecriture et image: notes sur les intertitres dans le cinéma muet', *Dialectiques*, no 9, Summer 1974, p 25. (My translation)

⁵ Michel Marie, 'Muet', in *Lectures du film*, Paris Editions Albatros, 1980, p 169. (My translation)

⁶ *ibid*, p 70.

⁷ Wyborny, *op cit*, p 126. Wyborny calls these 'indicators' STO: 'space-time indicators'.

⁸ cf Christian Metz, 'Ponctuations et démarcations dans le film de diégèse', *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Tome II, Paris, Editions Klincksieck, 1972, pp 111-137.

⁹ Noël Burch, 'Editing as a Plastic Art', in *Theory of Film Practice*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1973, p 41.

¹⁰ Tamar Lane, *The New Technique of Screen Writing*, op cit, p 8.

¹¹ *ibid*, pp 72-77. A 'primitive' use of fades is evident in the silent film *Stark Love* (1927) where fades separate the sequence of actions in a dramatic rescue scene. Wipes were introduced in 1931 with the increased availability of optical printers and improvements in duplicating stock.

¹² Hanns Eisler also affirmed the narrative vocation of early film music, which served to make 'fluid and more intense' 'all that encumbering machinery of exposition and story construction' (p 31), but he draws additional attention to the 'gap' induced by the 'prosaic irregularity and asymmetry' of the visual action and the 'symmetrically articulated conventional melody' (p 75). *Composing for the Films*, London, Dobson, 1947. (Collaboration with Theodor Adorno not acknowledged in this edition.)

¹³ David Bordwell's term in his

dissolve sequence recommended for 'the creation of time lapses by means of action rather than captions'¹⁰, its efficacy in 'eliminating detailed action' from overly-long scenes was also noted (and in this function was compared to the elimination of superfluous footage by the silent title). The liberal use of the lap dissolve was thus the antidote to 'the drag of the sound film' in both a temporal and narrative sense. As supplementary solutions, fades were recommended for more gradual changes or definite narrative breaks, and wipes—a 'modern device'—for more rapid scene transitions.¹¹

Apart from these more strongly coded spatial and temporal demarcations between scenes, the early sound film was obliged to create an effect of continuous time *within* a scene in contrast to the relatively pliable temporality of its silent precursor. Not only intertitles, but figurative strategies like the decorative title or the memory superimposition slightly attenuated the sense of time in the late silent text. Even musical accompaniment, composed to reinforce the continuity of diegetic time and space, could, by its own abstract nature as a sign-system, install (even if unwittingly) a *competing* temporality.¹²

If this more 'malleable, plastic duration'¹³ engaged by the late silent cinema meant that temporal lags or compressions could be potentially overlooked and the perception of a smooth-flowing narrative time maintained, the early sound cinema was afforded no such laxity. Once the space of the early sound film was defined as that of the dialogue scene, the *time* in which that dialogue occurred was henceforth strictly determined. Filmic time was now primarily subordinated to the duration of speech. Nor did this imply a slavish correspondence of image time with the length of a given piece of dialogue—as much as this assumption tends to dominate descriptive accounts of the transition. Critics and technicians alike quickly realised that the 'actual time-elapsed speed'¹⁴ of the dialogue could never substitute for the realism already granted to a fast-paced cutting style. The problem was therefore to *temporalise* that speech in such a way that it preserved and enhanced silent cutting trends.

Dialogue overlap between shots not only alleviated this problem at the level of the scene, but it also greatly reinforced the general impression of temporal continuity. (Only after 1931 was the voice occasionally used as a transitional device *between scenes*, carrying over fades, cuts, or lap dissolves.¹⁵) Both the reaction shot and offscreen sound indirectly eased these strict temporal exigencies since they modified the dictate that the speaker always be *shown speaking*. Yet even when this rule was abided by, a camera which *tracked with* the speaker had the virtue of offering the spectator-auditor continually new 'views', thereby compensating for the protracted time the image remained on the featured speaker. In the words of one transitional cinematographer, with the use of the travelling shot in the sound film, 'the planning of complicated dialogues is much facilitated, by the fact that persons can be shown in permanent motion; they can go on with the dialogue for quite a long time—for the ever

changing optical impressions help to avoid an otherwise inevitable monotony.¹⁶

A more intractable problem arose in co-ordinating the time determined by the dialogue with the duration of the action. One 1929 observer voiced the hope that 'the abrupt change of tempo when the dialogue stops and the action resumes will somehow be blended into a smooth running continuity',¹⁷ and many transitional films bear witness to the necessity for this particular temporal resolution.

Solutions were also sought for the extended sense of time over the course of the narrative as a whole. Contrasted with the preference in silent cinema for a 'minimum number of settings and sequences', one script-writer noted a 'revolutionary change' in scenario structure as a result of sound cinema's introduction of numerous short sequences.¹⁸ These were deemed necessary to offset the potential *deceleration* of a temporality paced according to the needs of dialogue: 'The brief, speedy sequence gives the film more movement, more sweep, and the illusion of more action.'¹⁹

Perhaps the most 'artificial' yet transparent device for the condensation of time was the continuation of non-diegetic music over scene transitions. By late 1929, scene transitions were not only strongly coded visually, but with the aid of non-diegetic music, often aurally coded as well. Two years later, non-diegetic music would make a discreet entry within the individual scene itself, concealing potential temporal ambiguities in auditory space by its self-effacing presence. In the words of a transitional composer, 'tonal figuration' supplied by non-diegetic music 'fills the tonal spaces and annihilates the silences without attracting special attention to itself'.²⁰

After all these ministrations, if any temporal indeterminacies remained, these went largely unnoticed thanks to the constant background sound which offered itself as a continuous and palpable temporal support of the fictional scene. Ambient sound served as a 'constant homogeneous substratum', whose 'thickness' hid any failures in the appearance of continuity and evacuated 'dead time' from the diegesis.²¹

Other actions taken to consolidate a realist duration had immediate bearing on the reorganisation of *space* in early Hollywood sound films. For example, with the introduction of sound and before the return of blimped cameras in 1930, in order to preserve silent cutting speeds and to record dialogue synchronously, studios adopted the practice of multiple camera shooting. This assured a variety of shot scales and camera angles – the latter within the limits of the heavily-blimped cameras – and largely preserved the form of scene dissection and editing pace associated with silent *découpage*. (The slightly longer average shot length of the early sound film would seem to be partly due to the more extensive use of reframings, lateral panning and tracking shots in the dialogue scene.) As David Bordwell has observed, the stake of this expensive camera operation was the recognition that 'silent filmmaking had developed the power of narration to penetrate the dramatic space, and to analyse it from

discussion of the transition in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, forthcoming, p 22. The following section is indebted to Chapter 23 of this manuscript.

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¹⁴ Tamar Lane cited by Bordwell, *ibid*, Chapter 23, p 22.

¹⁵ *Blonde Crazy* (1931), and *Dishonored* (1931) are the first films I have seen which make use of the voice in this manner.

¹⁶ Erno Metzner, 'The Travelling Camera', *Close Up*, vol X no 2, June 1933. *The Front Page* (1931) makes great use of this travelling dialogue shot – in one scene following the main speaker for 81 seconds.

¹⁷ Harold Franklin cited by David Bordwell, *op cit*, p 22.

¹⁸ Tamar Lane, 'The New Technique of Screen Writing...', *op cit*, p 12.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 12.

²⁰ Leonid Sabaneev, *Music for the Films*, London, Pitman 1935, p. 22. Hanns Eisler, *op cit*, traces this self-effacing character of non-diegetic music to the 'progressive grades of neutralization' its elements undergo in 'color intensity', 'spatial depth', and 'dynamic scale' (pp 80-87), as well as a 'standardisation of dynamics': 'The main purpose here is the production of a comfortable and polished euphony, which neither startles by its power (*fortissimo*) nor requires attentive listening because of its weakness (*pianissimo*)' (p. 18). He goes on to proclaim that by 'displaying a tendency to vanish as soon as it appears, motion picture music renounces its claim that it is *there*, which is today its cardinal sin' (p. 133).

²¹ cf. Claude Bailblé, 'Programmation de l'écoute', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 299, p. 3, and Chapter 4.

²² David Bordwell, *op cit*, pp. 18-19.

²³ Barry Salt documents the increased use of angle-reverse angle cutting (of which

many angles. The psychological development of the drama depended upon fluid shifts from long shots to angle and reverse angle positions, to inserts, and to close-ups. . . . This fluidity had to be restored.'²² But, as he proceeds to demonstrate, because shifts in shot scale were achieved by a battery of cameras with different lens lengths and *not* a physically closer camera position, the perspective of these shots often differed markedly from shot to shot, yielding a foreshortened and flattened perspective. Compared to the deeper and more volumetric spatial perspectives obtained by the moveable silent camera and its more moderate lens lengths, multiple-camera shooting did not 'completely recover the sense of penetrating the scene's space'.

On the other hand, if these perspective discrepancies would seem to have hindered the spectator's penetration of cinematic space, he/she nonetheless infiltrated that same space by other means. One major method of spectator inscription in early sound film was the increased use of the shot/reverse shot structure of the dialogue scene.²³ This figure located the spectator of sound film firmly within cinematic space in both a topographical and psychical sense. A shot of character B taken from over character A's shoulder and along the axis of A's look, followed by a reverse-angle shot of A taken from over B's shoulder and along B's axis of vision, permits the spectator to view the direct spatial relation between the characters and from their approximate spatial positions. Though unlike the literal or implied point-of-view shot to the extent that there is an explicit differentiation of the camera/spectator's look from that of the character, the shot/reverse shot structure of the dialogue scene does not thereby lessen the spectator's implication in the diegetic instance. On the contrary: if the spectator is less inclined to strictly identify with the fictional character, she/he is, on the other hand, more strongly disposed to identify with the *look* which has caused their visual fields to coincide. The effectivity of a relay of looks that plays off the subjective point-of-view against the objective non-point-of-view is precisely the assurance of ubiquity and omnipotence it fosters in the spectator with respect to 'narrative space'. The specificity of the shot/reverse shot structure of the dialogue scene is that it incorporates this tension into its very structure. While the look is differed from each of the characters and therefore promotes a more objective position, the shared *axis of vision* with each character in the same moment 'subjectivises' that visual exchange. We might speculate, then, that with the generalisation of this figure in early sound cinema, the code of looks becomes more tightly articulated with the consolidation of a narrative space.²⁴

Finally, if camera movement within scenes in early sound cinema gave a specific momentum to a continuously-recorded scene, it also 'lent a greater sense of depth to the shot; in this way the mobile camera compensated for the flatness produced by the telephoto lens in multiple camera shooting.'²⁵ Though space was less defined in terms of a deep focus perspective in this cinema, thanks to camera movement it was also more fully disclosed. Moving about in a static scene, or following the speaker

in a dialogue scene, the moving camera continually reconstituted a narrative space now 'invaded' by speech, and offered the spectator-auditor a vicarious mastery of its contours.²⁶

Thus, if the position of *omnipresence* afforded by silent cinema's extensive point-of-view cutting and greater depth of focus was temporarily sacrificed in early sound films, this was more than compensated for by the position of *omnipotence* offered the spectator-auditor by a more frequent recourse to the shot/reverse shot structure and camera movement in the dialogue scene.

Undoubtedly, the most far-reaching spatial disjunction between the silent and sound film arose because the advent of sound introduced a 'sonorous landscape' no longer circumscribed by auditory events occurring in the theatrical surroundings, but by those transpiring in a recorded acoustical environment. Thus a *wholly new* mode of spatial delineation dependent upon auditory 'indicators' was henceforth activated. The inscription of a scenographic perspective was no longer confined to visually-determined means, but was also reinforced by the creation of an auditory perspective. One crucial spatial 'indicator' was provided by ambient sound, this time not in the service of a continuous temporality, but invoked to establish a specific acoustical 'character' for any given filmic space. Background or 'ambient' sound, if undesirable when too noticeable, was nevertheless an essential component in the creation of a verisimilitudinous acoustical environment for vocal events. Taken from the original pro-filmic space (or a comparable one), an ambient track or 'loop' with controlled reverberation, frequency, etc, was re-recorded with the voice, providing the latter with an essential, though highly muted support.

The creation of depth was now the consequence of both visual and aural conventions. The occurrence of any auditory event was immediately given a depth dimension by the specific relations constructed between volume and reverberation. In particular, it was the relation between voice modulation and the reverberation of the pro-filmic, acoustical space which was deemed most capable of simulating conditions of binaural hearing, despite the passage of these auditory elements through a *monaural* sound apparatus.

Under normal, binaural hearing conditions, the voice is properly located in space by the exercise of particular aural capacities. Distance is ascertained by measuring variations in voice intensity and frequency, by judging the 'character' of the space in which the voice makes its emission, and by assessing the image 'weight' of the speaker in relation to the intensity and clarity with which the voice is heard. The direction of the voice is similarly adduced by the listener, who, turning his/her head instinctively toward the source of emission can, by this centring activity, abolish the differences in phase and intensity between the voice heard by the right and left ears respectively. Once this realignment of ears and vocal source is accomplished, the voice is localised and its source visually identified. This latter activity also implies a mobilisation of the auditor's *selective* capacities. Once the voice becomes the primary object of

the over-the-shoulder shot/reverse shot is but one variation) in his article, 'Film Style and Technology in the Forties', *Film Quarterly*, vol 31 no 1, Fall 1977. As a general tendency of this trend, however, we can note Salt's claim that '(in) the later twenties many Hollywood films had 20-30 per cent reverse-angle cuts, and ... the figures kept going up in the thirties' (p 52).

²⁴ cf. Stephen Heath, 'Narrative Space', *Screen*, vol 17 no 3, Autumn 1976. For an expanded discussion of the shot/reverse shot as a 'suturing' mechanism of classical narrative cinema, cf. the substantial body of writing on this subject in *Screen*, vol 18 no 4, Winter 1977/78; Daniel Dayan, 'The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema', *Film Quarterly*, vol 28 no 1, Fall 1974; William Rothman, 'Against the System of the Suture', *Film Quarterly* vol 29 no 1, Fall 1975.

²⁵ David Bordwell, *op cit*, p 45.

²⁶ cf. Bordwell's discussion of how camera movement yields 'a strong illusion of a subjective

22 movement through an objective space' in 'Camera Movement and Cinematic Space', *Cinettracts*, vol 1 no 2, Summer 1977, and his article 'Camera Movement, The Coming of Sound, and the Classical Hollywood Style', in *Purdue Film Studies Annual* (1977).

²⁷ See Gerald M Murch, 'Auditory Perception', in *Visual and Auditory Perception*, New York, 1973. The importance attached to binaurality and head movement in localising sounds is upheld by Murch who cites experiments where these two capacities are tested. (The first of these was conducted in the eighteenth century by the Italian physicist Giovanni Venturi, who blindfolded a subject in a field and walked around him, ringing a bell at a distance of 150 feet. Venturi reported that lateral localisation was good, though front and back localisation was noticeably poorer.)

²⁸ Joe W Coffman, 'Art and Science in Sound Film Production', *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, vol XIV no 2,

auditory attention, the ear suppresses incidental noises in the surrounding environment (the 'cocktail party effect'), and thereby creates more favourable conditions for the voice's reception.²⁷

All these forms of discrimination which the ear undertakes in relation to the voice in binaural hearing conditions were denied by the listening conditions of the monaural apparatus adopted by early sound cinema. Compensation for these deficiencies provided the main stimulus for technical activity since it was widely conceded that the restoration of depth to a voice recorded monaurally was the essential condition of an auditory impression of reality. The spectator-auditor had to be offered a coherent *position of audition* if the voice was to be securely fastened to its featured source. Without this attachment, the voice risked being disassociated from the source of its emission, potentially instilling in the spectator-auditor a similar sense of disembodiment. Hence, certain techniques of depth simulation were engaged.

Based on acoustical principles of binaurality, the voice belonging to the diegetic character who receded from the camera was to appear to decrease accordingly in loudness, while the reverberation present was to appear to increase materially with this vocal attenuation.²⁷ Whatever camera-subject distance was adopted, within or across shots, the voice was to be aligned along these two axes. If the speaking subject moved around within a scene, the variation in volume and reverberation was to reflect the altered relations with depth that this vocal mobility elicited. (On this point, technicians generally agreed that depth-effect was best achieved by a judicious placing of microphones and setting of appropriate dials before, rather than during the take. The concern was not to remove 'control of the voice currents far from the scene of action' to the monitoring room once shooting had commenced.²⁸)

Against these prescriptions, though decidedly in the minority, were technicians who advocated, in the same name of providing a coherent auditory position, the attainment of close-up sound quality whatever their visual counterparts. Their critics attributed the attitude of these technicians to the influence of radio where it was 'desirable to present all sounds as coming from approximately the same place - that of the microphone'.²⁹ However, the realist basis of this preference for close-up sound quality was disputed by noting that the spatial and dramatic attributes of cinema precluded the use of radio acoustics as a sufficient model. The paradox of the concerted attempt to obtain flawless sound reproduction, it was pointed out, was the effacement of the very depth upon which early sound cinema depended for its claim to a 'gain in realism'. The use of more than one microphone for a given camera position, for example, tended to 'destroy the proper depth illusion' since multiple mikes often failed to register the voice modulation which occurred with a body's movement about a given scene.³⁰ Fading microphone circuits combined with detailed word cues were of some help in registering more distant sounds in a set and avoided the bad pick-up and distortion attendant upon the use of open mikes. However, in the absence of precision, these could also produce 'dead' spots or 'misses' which would be immediately

noticed by the auditor. The improper use of the microphone boom (often in conjunction with fading circuits), was equally culpable in this destruction of sound perspective if its excessive pursuits of a character's movements did not continue to coincide with the ensuing camera-subject distance. Above all, then, principles of radio realism were rejected for cinematic purposes since the mutual implication of mechanically-reproduced sounds and images in the talking cinema was seen to have introduced the need for new cinematic standards and conventions.³¹

When it was a matter of properly spatialising the voice by the manipulation of volume and reverberation across cuts and the corresponding changes in scale and angle, similar care was demanded. However, the extent to which this auditory depth of field was *strictly* correlated with a visual counterpart is a more complex matter. Although alterations in volume and reverberation levels over cuts within and between scenes could now be used to convey spatial relations, this was not the unequivocal gain it might first have appeared to be. While technicians and critics alike insisted upon a *direct* correspondance between changing shot scales and shifts in volume and reverberation levels, it is clear that in order to conform to other conventions of auditory realism (especially with respect to dialogue intelligibility), this dictate would only be obeyed with narrowly-defined limits. When conventions of sound perspective threatened dialogue intelligibility, the unquestioned primacy of the audible voice always triumphed. This concession was justified by the conviction that the voice 'must not be allowed to become actually unintelligible for any length of time, even where this might be so under natural conditions'.³²

This covert endorsement of a hierarchy privileging the voice helps to clarify why the *practice* of depth simulation through shifts in volume and reverberation levels was not as widely used to *precisely* localise the voice as the discussions of transitional technicians would lead us to believe. The problem in *strictly* adhering to the demand that volume and reberation alter with each new presentation of a spatial field was the potential *attention* it might attract to the acoustical shifts themselves at the expense of the cinematic voice. For example, in cutting from a close-up to a long shot within a scene containing dialogue, a volume level which plummeted accordingly might provide the spectator-auditor with an abundance of depth cues and a corresponding auditory position, but that very manipulation also threatened to render more difficult an effortless assimilation of the voice by virtue of its marked acoustical enfeeblement. (Conversely, the constancy of a close-up sound quality with no changes in volume and reverberation levels within a shot or over cuts, would potentially *de-spatialise* the voice and thereby undermine its realist inscription.) The solution to these two potential pitfalls seems to have been a discerning use of volume and reverberation changes where the voice was concerned, according to the scenographic situation in general, and the dramatic requirements of the voice in particular. Throughout a dialogue scene, the level of the voice(s) generally remained that of the

²⁹ *ibid*, p 173.

³⁰ In *Applause* (1929), Mamoulian deliberately overruled this maxim on dramatic grounds: 'While directing the scene in which the girl quietly says her prayers in bed, as the mother softly serenades her with "Give Your Little Baby Lots of Lovin"', Mamoulian wanted both voices to be equal in volume, yet intimately close-miked. Though informed by the technicians that the standard procedure was to record dramatic scenes with only one microphone, Mamoulian stubbornly insisted that each actress be placed on an individual mike with the two tracks blended in a mixer.' - Museum of Modern Art Program Notes, 1978.

³¹ On the basis of these debates, it would seem that depth simulation was initiated *in cinema*, prompting a response in radio. This is confirmed by Rudolf Arnheim who, in 1936, reports on the achievement of acoustical depth in sound films and then comments:

24 'In wireless, this development is still in its infancy. As in the first films, a standard distance is still adhered to closely, and any departure from the normal volume of sound is regarded with disfavour.' – *Radio*, London, Faber & Faber, 1936, p 61.

³² Carl Dreher, 'Motion Picture Recording', *Radio News*, November 1930, p 416.

³³ Courtroom and prison genres exploited reverberation levels for obvious dramatic effect. Thanks are due to Ben Brewster for drawing my attention to this discrepancy between the insistence of adjusting volume to varying shot scale and the frequent lack of adherence to this rule in evidence in transitional films.

master sound take, irrespective of changes in shot scale. Only when altered shot scale was in the service of heightening the voice's dramatic effect was there a corresponding shift in volume level. While the same was generally true for alteration in reverberation levels, it would seem that slightly more attention was paid to the provision of an appropriate resonance to each shot of a vocal utterance, especially when this entailed distinctions between outside and interior scenes, and among specific interior settings.³³ Nonetheless, even if volume and reverberation levels were not used for explicit auditory confirmation of every new 'view', their subtle presence within every scene did create a more precise auditory delimitation of the scenographic space.

CORRECTION

The second part of 'Transforming Television', by Carl Gardner and Julie Sheppard, will not appear in this issue, as indicated in our March-April 1984 edition, but in a forthcoming number.

Where will you find serious film lovers on Wednesday nights?

Naturally enough, serious film lovers like to spend most of their time at the cinema. But on Wednesday nights you'll want to get back from the box office in time to watch the box. 11.15 pm on May 9th sees the return of 'Visions', six programmes in the most informative series on the big screen that you're likely to find on the small screen.

Two Women Directors: Wendy Toye and Sally Potter

A look at the work of two women who have made distinctive contributions to British cinema. The programme includes coverage of Sally Potter's new film 'Gold Diggers,' with Julie Christie.

Italy: The Image Business

Current goings-on in the Italian cinema, including an interview with Sergio Leone, who has just completed his first feature for 10 years, 'Once Upon A Time In America.'

Cinema, Cinemas

A programme from the French series about the cinema, courtesy of a channel across the Channel.

Cinema Shows in the US and USSR

How does America's 'At The Movies' stand up against Russia's 'Kinopanorama'?

Third World Cinema:

Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Mozambique
The state of the art in the African States.

The Svankmajer Case

A portrait of the Czech surrealist animator, Jan Svankmajer.

Visions. Wednesdays 11.15pm.



FROM 'AIDA' TO 'ZAUBERFLÖTE'

JENNIFER BATCHELOR CONSIDERS
THE OPERA FILM



¹ Italian adage (literally, 'first the music, then the eyes') quoted by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, one of the leading contemporary producers of opera on stage and director of it on film/video, in Imre Fabian, *Im Gespräch mit Jean-Pierre Ponnelle*, Orell Füssli Verlag,

*Prima la musica, dopo gli occhi*¹

OPERA AND FILM are regarded in the popular imagination as radically different – polar opposites in the high art versus mass art debate, they are also thought to occupy very different positions in terms of their representations of 'real life': cinema striving for the maximum of naturalism/realism, opera (even *verismo*) being stylised and conventional.

Criticism, too, has tended to simplify its objects. Despite the fact that both constitute 'multiple art' forms, one aspect of each is privileged. The drama, performance and spectacle of opera are secondary to considerations of the aural, while the soundtrack of a film is virtually excluded from the analysis at the expense of that of the visual.

What happens when these two complex forms are tossed into the melting pot and emerge as opera films? A series of options presents itself to the film-maker, depending on whether s/he intends to use the film's tendency towards realism to 'naturalise' the opera in question, or, conversely, to capitalise on opera's supposed anti-realism to free film from the straightjacket of ever more naturalistic representation.

At the critical end there is too often a loss of nerve, or simply a failure to be able to cope with the opera film as a combination of forms, but an entity in its own right: instead, its elements are separated out and it is considered either as film or opera and comes into the province of either film or music critic – or, even worse, of both. This state of affairs was rightly deplored by Hans Jürgen Syberberg, director of the opera film, *Parsifal*, at a recent talk in the National Film Theatre.² When Zeffirelli's *La Traviata* was reviewed by the *Times*' film critic, David Robinson³, he concentrated on the film's visual and narrative aspects, saying cavalierly that 'others will judge the musical significance of the production.' When the *Guardian* reviewed the same film⁴, it was discussed by the paper's music critic, Tom Sutcliffe, while film critic Derek Malcolm handled the week's other film releases.

Film analysts and theorists have also given the opera film the go by, if not the thumbs down. The literature on the musical as a cinematic form is vast, that on the opera film minute. This is not because it is subsumed into discussion of the musical: apart from a paragraph here and a footnote there, it has simply been ignored. The recent crop of opera films – and there are more on the way – suggest that this cannot go on. It deserves more serious consideration as a discrete object of study, rather than as an impossible hybrid beyond the reaches of analysis.

In this article, I want to sketch in a history of the opera film and then, through a consideration of the principal opera films made in the last decade – *Moses und Aron* (Jean-Marie Straub/Danielle Huillet), *The Magic Flute* (*Trollflöjten*, Ingmar Bergman), *Don Giovanni* (Joseph Losey), *Parsifal* (Hans Jürgen Syberberg), *La Traviata* (Franco Zeffirelli) and a clutch of *Carmen* films, *Prénom Carmen* (Jean-Luc Godard), Peter Brook's three film versions of his stage adaptation *La Tragédie de Carmen* and a version each by Carlos Saura and Francesco Rosi – to demonstrate the fluidity of the form and to suggest some reasons why it has suddenly become a focus of interest for both audiences and film-makers.

The idea of the opera film is by no means new. There have been opera films from as early as 1903, when a film of *Faust* was produced by Pathé. There were strong reasons why cinema should want to tackle opera and these reasons pertained even, and especially, before the introduction of sound. From the start what the cinema needed was spectacle or narrative: opera offered both. Operas could be readily adapted to the new medium and provide vehicles for studio stars. In 1926, for example, King Vidor directed *La Bohème* for MGM, with Lillian Gish as Mimi.⁵ In 1915, two film versions of *Carmen* (already, by then there were several versions of the most-often filmed opera in existence) were made.

Zurich and Schwäbisch Hall, 1983, p. 52. (Ponnelle's film versions of Mozart's *Die Hochzeit des Figaro* and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* were both shown on British television in 1983.)

² In a *Guardian* Lecture at the National Film Theatre, London, on April 1, 1983.

³ The *Times*, October 21, 1983.

⁴ The *Guardian*, October 20, 1983.

⁵ Gish fasted so much to achieve a convincingly tubercular appearance that the crew reportedly thought that the actress herself had died during the shooting of Mimi's death scene. See David Robinson, *Hollywood in the Twenties*, London, Zwemmer, 1968.



Above, Lillian Gish as the dying Mimi in Vidor's *La Bohème*.

One, adapted and directed by Raoul Walsh for Fox, starred 'the vamp', Theda Bara, the other, directed by Cecil B DeMille for the Jesse L Lasky Feature Play Company, starred opera singer Geraldine Farrar. Mary Pickford appeared in *Madame Butterfly*, also in 1915. Even Charlie Chaplin got in on the operatic act in 1916 when, for Essanay, he directed and appeared, as Darn Hosiery (Don José), in yet another version of *Carmen*.

For an industry obsessed with having its product taken seriously as an art form, opera – the high art, *par excellence* – held obvious appeal. Opera was used to give cultural credence to the would-be seventh art. The idea of silent opera films is not as ludicrous as it might at first appear – silent films were rarely, if ever, so. In first run cinemas there were orchestras, smaller cinemas had trios, quartets, etc and the smallest could muster at least an upright piano. (An advertisement for Griffith's *Intolerance* at the Liberty Theatre, New York, includes the note that the film was 'Accompanied by Orchestra from the Metropolitan Opera House'.) It was a small step from there to including singers in the pit who would provide the sound for the silent opera films. As early as 1910 a gramophone recording of a bass from the Paris Opéra singing an aria from *Faust* was used in unison with that singer's acting the role on screen.

The coming of recorded sound brought opera to the fore again. Opera singers were used to demonstrate the efficacy of the new medium. In 1926, singers such as Giovanni Martinelli made the first Vitaphone sound films of opera arias. (In 1927, the Vitaphone process launched *The Jazz Singer* into the history books as the first 'talking picture'.)

It wasn't a totally one-sided arrangement: musicians were as interested in film as vice versa. In 1926, for instance, Richard Strauss and Hugo

von Hofmannsthal made a special version of *Der Rosenkavalier*, altering the original score, for a film directed by Robert Wiene. When it was first shown in London, Strauss himself conducted the orchestra in the pit of the Tivoli cinema. Similarly, Gustave Charpentier collaborated with Abel Gance on the latter's film of his opera, *Louise* (1938), which starred Grace Moore. Many singers, like Moore, also appeared in feature films. Enrico Caruso, for instance, made no actual opera film, but was encouraged by Jesse Lasky (himself an erstwhile musician) to appear in two pictures – at a salary of one hundred thousand dollars per picture – for Famous Players-Lasky. The first, a comedy entitled *My Cousin* (1918) in which Caruso played two roles, a New York barber and his cousin, a famous (moustachioed) tenor, was, despite Caruso's fame and stage success, such a box office flop that the second film, though completed, was never released.⁶

Just as the film industry wanted to gain from the cultural prestige of opera, so did musicians want to take advantage of the chance of bringing their work to the attention of a new and larger audience. This has continued into more recent times: one of the best known examples being Benjamin Britten's opera adaptation of Henry James, *Owen Wingrave* (1971), composed especially for television.

Some of the best-known instances of operas being filmed by major film-makers are GW Pabst's *Don Quichotte* (1933), with Chaliapin, Ophüls' *Die verkaufte Braut* (1938) with Janula Novotná and, in 1951, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Jean Renoir was involved in a 1940 film of *Tosca*, most of which was directed by Carl Koch (he, Renoir and Luchino Visconti wrote the scenario), featuring Imperio Argentina as Tosca, with Michel Simon as Scarpia and Rossano Brazzi as Cavaradossi.

Problems of obtaining satisfactory sound reproduction in cinemas caused a loss of interest in the opera film. This is not to say that films of opera did not continue to be made. They did, but tended to be made as historical records of stage productions – for instance, several Hamburg Staatsoper productions, productions at the Komische Oper, East Berlin and by Herbert von Karajan at Salzburg (such as *Der Rosenkavalier*, with Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, directed by Paul Czinner, 1962).

Italy, not surprisingly, has regularly produced opera films. The system of post-synchronisation used in Italian cinema meant that, since voice and its source were radically separate, there was no need to insist on the actor on screen being s/he whose voice adorned the soundtrack. This led to such instances as Gina Lollobrigida's appearing in *I Pagliacci* (1949) with Tito Gobbi, the latter playing the roles of both Tonio and Silvio, and a version of *Aida* (1953) with a blacked-up Sophia Loren in the title role, dubbed by Renata Tebaldi.

The trend now is for opera films to have the leading parts on both sound and vision tracks, taken by singers, although exceptions persist, such as Syberberg's *Parsifal* and Saura's *Carmen*. One of the main reasons for the change is that opera singers are often as well-known as are movie actors. Many of them, partly as a result of changing theatrical

⁶ Jesse L. Lasky, with Don Weldon, *I Blow My Own Horn*, London, Gollancz, 1957, pp 127-128.

traditions and partly as a result of working in television, are accomplished actors in their own right. Gone, too, for the most part, are the stereotypes of the short, rotund tenor and the vast soprano. There remain exceptions, of course, but those who plan a career in opera must now expect to be seen in close-up on television and video, if not film, as well as on stage, and casting requirements have shifted predictably towards physical idealisation.

Some opera singers have attained the status of stars. Since Maria Callas put them back on the front pages of newspapers, the biggest stars have been not sopranos, but tenors. Both Plácido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti have made big-budget movies. The former has stayed so far with opera—Alfredo in Zeffirelli's *Traviata* (1983) and Don José in Rosi's *Carmen* (1984); the latter, physically less well-suited to the role of operatic hero, launched out, Caruso-style, into a feature film, *Yes, Giorgio* (1982), which received a critical mauling ('No, Luciano' went one brief review) and flopped at the box office. It has yet to have a UK release. Ruggero Raimondi, the bass-baritone who took the lead in Losey's *Don Giovanni*, also appears, as Escamillo, in Rosi's *Carmen*. In between, though, he has made a film with Alain Resnais, *Ma Vie est un Roman* (1983) in which he plays a leading, non-singing, rôle. No female singer has yet moved between opera stage and screen with the ease and success of a Domingo or a Raimondi—perhaps none is considered to have the necessary box office appeal to be given the chance.

Just as early cinema tried to legitimise film by making it more respectable by brushing it up against opera, so one of the thrusts of the opera film has been to render a potentially elitist medium more popular. Television and video, not to mention records and tapes and the spread of venues from beyond the capital cities (Opera North, Welsh and Scottish National Operas, Kent Opera in the UK, similar companies in the US, the range of German opera houses, etc) have created an audience for opera on film sufficient to justify the risk of a sizeable budget. Equally important have been the technical developments which have greatly improved the quality of sound, both on the film sound-track and in the reproduction facilities of Dolby Sound in cinemas. Listening to opera films can now be a pleasurable activity, though there is still room for improvement.

There is no such thing as 'the opera film' as a formal given. One of the most exciting aspects of the resurgence of interest in filming opera in the last ten years has been precisely in the fluidity of the form. The premise upon which each of the major opera films (leaving aside all the TV work and the more conventional stage-to-screen transfers) has been built has been radically different, as have the end results. To separate out some of the differences and to suggest the richness of the form one may examine each briefly.

La Traviata (1983), directed by Franco Zeffirelli has been, perhaps, the most modest in its aspirations and, on the level it sets itself, remarkably successful. Zeffirelli, unlike most directors of opera films, has produced a great deal of opera in the theatre and he has been content

merely to adapt Verdi's opera to film. Not for him the notion of a contemporary reading; he prefers to suggest the timeless qualities of the tragic melodrama. The settings, though over-opulent, are naturalistic, with plenty of accurate historical detail to heighten veracity, and the spectator is encouraged to forget (except briefly at the end of the first and final acts) the stage origins of the work and to regard it within the conventions of a Hollywood musical. There are a few unfortunate moments when Zeffirelli has felt the need to use the facilities of film to do what a stage production usually cannot: Alfredo's and Violetta's Act Two country idyll is transferred outdoors to the Normandy countryside, with a considerable loss of dramatic intensity as the lovers are observed picking flowers (she), riding a horse (he), boating and – hideous cliché – falling off logs into streams. Such moments are embarrassing, but mercifully few. As is customary in his stage-work, Zeffirelli elicits conventionally naturalistic performances from his principals – Domingo and, particularly, Teresa Stratas – and the crowd-work is, as usual, elaborately coordinated. Despite the faults and schmaltz, it works. One might ask whether it works partly because the story of the consumptive courtesan falling foul of bourgeois *mores* at a well-defined historical moment is exactly the stuff of which the classic realist text is wont to be made – cf George Cukor's *Camille*, with Greta Garbo.

The treatment might have been different. Zeffirelli aims for quality throughout – the 'best' singers, vocally, dramatically and (crucially, for credibility on the big screen) physically, who act in an understated rather than theatrically gestural manner on camera; the most lavish sets and costumes; even the ballet episode, often the tackiest part of a stage

Below, naturalism or idealisation? Leads Domingo and Stratas in Zeffirelli's *La Traviata*.



performance, has been turned into a production number, with Bolshoi Ballet principals flown in to maintain the production values. The music track, too, involves musicians of the highest prestige; not only Domingo and Stratas, but also the orchestra and chorus of the Metropolitan Opera, New York, conducted by James Levine.

Another director who has produced opera on stage and film is Ingmar Bergman. His film of *Die Zauberflöte* (*Trollflöjten*, 1974) approaches Mozart's opera in a way quite different to that in *La Traviata*. Most importantly, the film is at pains never to let the spectator forget that s/he is watching a *performance* and the artifice of the medium is never hidden. The action is placed in a theatre, there are frequent shots of members of the audience, particularly (but not exclusively) during the overture, and there are views of backstage goings-on to link the scenes. At times, the action seems to expand beyond the confines of the stage, but onto a larger stage rather than into a kind of *Traviata*-like 'real life'. The opera is sung not in the original German, but in Swedish (the film was made for Sweden's Television TV2, and then given cinema and video release), and, except for Håkan Hagegård in the role of Papageno, the singers are not internationally familiar. This film is made in the belief that opera only really comes to life in the act of performance; it is not merely a film of an opera, but one in which the theatrical origins of opera are never denied. The 'theatre' itself is a model of that in Drottningholm Palace, outside Stockholm – an eighteenth century theatre like those of the time in which the opera was written. The sets and stage machinery all give the same references to Mozart's own day.

A second Mozart opera which has recently been filmed is *Don Giovanni* (1979). It was directed by Joseph Losey, who had no previous experience of producing opera in the theatre. Like Zeffirelli, Losey banishes the stage in favour of a more naturalistic setting and, like him too, he uses singers of international stature and photogenic mien – Ruggero Raimondi in the title role, José Van Dam, Kiri te Kanawa, Teresa Berganza, Edda Moser, etc. But, where Zeffirelli opts for the creation of settings appropriate to the signified of the opera – Normandy countryside, Parisian Second Empire demi-monde interiors – Losey attempts to find settings appropriate to its signifier, a visual equivalent to the formal properties of Mozart's music. The film, therefore, locates the drama in and around a series of Palladian buildings and the tale is transposed to the Veneto. This further allows for shots of journeys in gondolas, figures disguised like *Commedia dell'Arte* characters and for Don Giovanni to descend into Hell via the flames of a glass factory. A constant tension is maintained between the rigour of Palladio's architecture and Mozart's music and the more-or-less naturalistic performances, with Raimondi as the Don, striding across the screen from conquest to conquest.

Another attempt to find a more than merely naturalistically appropriate style for the opera in hand informs Straub and Huillet's Brechtian treatment of Schönberg's *Moses und Aron* (1975). Their solution is to place the action of the Old Testament story in an amphitheatre – the representation is simultaneously freed from the confines of the pros-

⁷ For an excellent discussion of the film, see Martin Walsh, "'Moses and Aaron': Straub and Huillet's Schoenberg" in his *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, London, British Film Institute, 1981, pp 91-107. (Article originally published in *Jump Cut*, nos 12/13, 1977.)

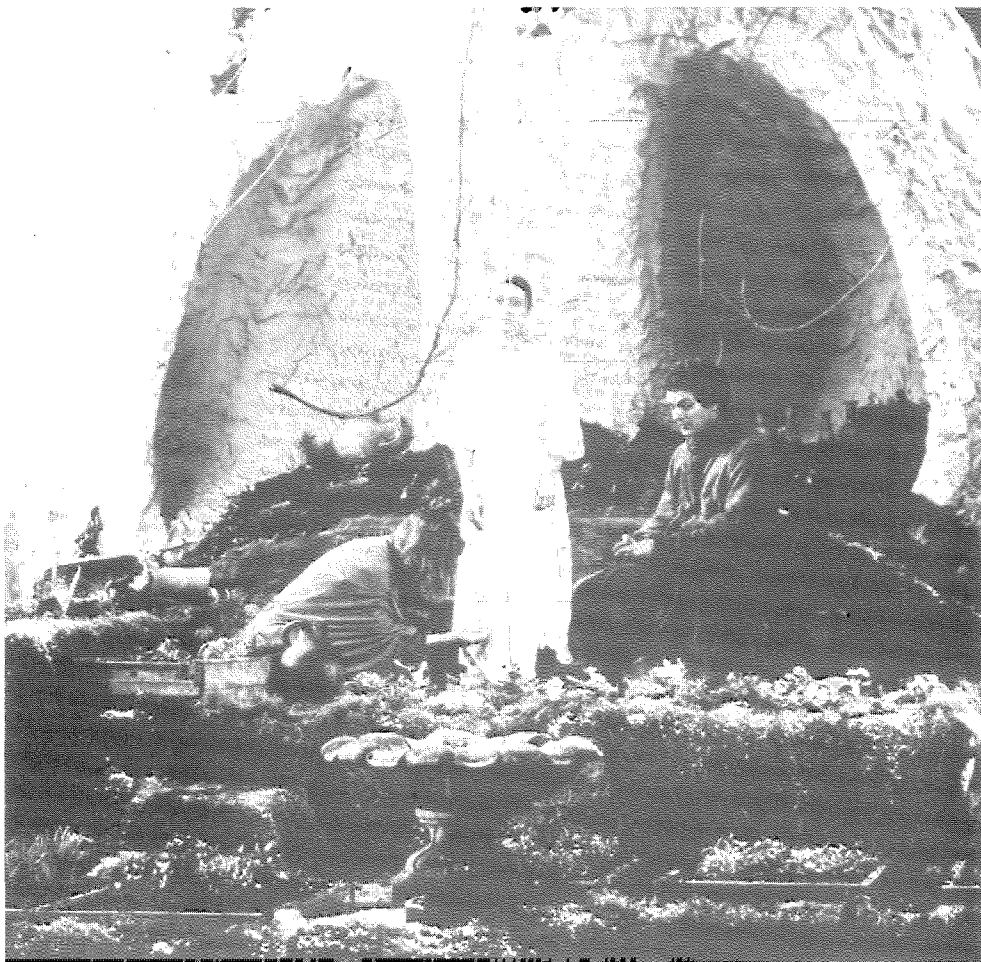


cenium arch, while still contained within an ancient site of performance. Here, the opera film is not limited to being self-referential and hermetically sealed. It is used for an analysis of contemporary social relations. Straub and Huillet have also skewed Schönberg's text to make it less a case of audience identification with either Moses or Aaron than an investigation of the workings of power and the role of the people.⁷

Above, Palladian proportion in Losey's *Don Giovanni*.

Below, the amphitheatre setting in Straub/Huillet's *Moses und Aaron*.





Above, Syberberg's *Parsifal* (here played by a woman) enacted in Wagner's cranium.

A similar strategy informs Hans Jurgens Syberberg's *Parsifal* (1982—one hundred years exactly after the opera's first performance in Bayreuth). In this case, the film encompasses a performance of the opera, a study of its composer, Wagner, and an analysis of Western culture in general and German culture in particular. There is neither stage, nor a naturalistic setting. The whole drama is set in a studio and the action takes place on a giant mock-up of Wagner's death mask. The events literally emanate from Wagner's cranium. There is also, as is customary in Syberberg's films, an accretion of other material, via projections, maquettes, etc to comment on the action and beyond, thereby giving the spectator a mass of information of which the opera itself forms only a part.

While a film like Zeffirelli's *Traviata* goes to enormous lengths to close the gap between sound and image by having the singer/actors mime to the pre-recorded soundtrack as accurately as possible, Syberberg positively exploits this distance. The role of Parsifal is played by two actors, one male, one female, and sung by a third; the role of Kundry is

sung by Yvonne Minton and performed by Edith Clever; of the principal characters, only Robert Lloyd (as Gurnemanz) and Aage Haugland (Klingsor) perform their roles on both sound and image track. The effects achieved are not just non-naturalistic—they are anti-naturalistic. Syberberg is taking two known quantities, opera and film, and exploring the space between them. Contrasting film with theatre in his NFT lecture, the director argued that the former has lost its 'aura'—in Benjamin's sense of the authoritative uniqueness of the original work rather than the reproduction. His creation of a film around an extremely anti-naturalistic opera production, with its foregrounding of the element of performance, is an attempt to restore that aura.

Carmen, the most frequently filmed (at least 38 so far) of all operas, has just yielded another cluster of versions: Godard's *Prénom Carmen*, Saura's dance-drama *Carmen*, Peter Brook's three filmed versions of his stage adaptation of the opera *La Tragédie de Carmen* (all in 1983), and Rosi's 'straight' version (1984). Arguably, some of them are not actually opera films at all.

For Godard, not only is Carmen the first name of the main protagonist, the well-known story is also the starting point of the movie. He updates the drama—the time is now; Carmen robs banks; Don José has become Joseph (Joe), a gendarme, his costume jokily adapted to recall the uniform of his operatic predecessor; the director, himself, is embroiled in the action, as was Mérimée in the short story upon which

Below, Godard's *Prénom Carmen*: director and music get in on the act.



Bizet drew. Godard retains the idea that *Carmen* wouldn't be *Carmen* without music, but rejects Bizet's. Instead, there are Beethoven's quartets, performed within the diegesis as well as heard on the soundtrack. All that remains of Bizet is someone heard whistling a snatch from the opera.

Saura, too, incorporates music other than Bizet's, though a good deal more of Bizet is included than in the Godard film. (Sections of the opera are heard, with the voices of Regina Resnik and Mario del Monaco.) Here, the familiar tale of the independent woman who captivates a man by whom, when she rejects him, she is destroyed is played out in and split between a dance version of the drama and the people supposedly putting on the show. Saura extends the mode he explored in the earlier *Bodas de Sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) (1981). Again there is dance, again choreographed and danced by Antonio Gades. In *Blood Wedding*, the dancers are seen in the first ten minutes of the film arriving at a venue and putting on make-up and costumes in preparation for a performance: the rest of the film is that performance. In *Carmen*, the structure is more elaborate, with Saura shifting attention constantly between sections of dance and the off-stage lives of performers. It becomes increasingly difficult to establish what is happening to the characters 'themselves' and when they are acting out their 'roles': as in other films by Saura, such as *Cria Cuervos* (1976), the spectator is left unsure of what is 'real', what 'imaginary' and the meaning is floating, rather than fixed. As well as being about *Carmen* and a performance of *Carmen*, the film also can be said to be about 'Spanishness', with music not just from Bizet, but Spanish folk idioms, including flamenco.

When Peter Brook decided to stage *La Tragédie de Carmen* at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris, he pared down Bizet's music and drama. Brook had three 'teams' of performers, so that the opera could be put on nightly, with the singers working in rotation. The production was a huge success. When the chance came to film it, Brook refused to opt for one of his teams. Instead, he made a package of the three films, sold with the proviso that each would be shown by the purchaser. So far, one of them has been shown in Britain, on Channel 4, and the others will follow. However, the first production seems somewhat muted on film (or, at least, on film on television, which is not the same). Bizet's opera may have been pared down by Brook, but incidents from Mérimée not used by Bizet have been reinstated. This is particularly unfortunate for the ending – in the original short story, the bullfighter who is Carmen's new lover is fatally gored by a bull, thus removing any need for Don José to dispose of him (as he has other rivals for Carmen's affection) and he subsequently kills Carmen when she refuses his love. In Bizet, while Escamillo is being cheered after a triumph in the bull-ring, Carmen refuses to return to the spurned Don José and is killed. Brook, however, tries to conflate the two endings, and what could have been a tragedy is more of a damp squib. He makes it seem as if Carmen allows herself to be killed because Escamillo's death in the *corrida* has given her nothing to live for. What is a triumph in Bizet's version becomes banal in Brook's.

At the time of writing, Francesco Rosi's version of *Carmen* has yet to be released. Certain things may, however, be surmised. The cast includes star performers – Domingo as Don José, Raimondi as Escamillo. The role of Carmen is acted and sung by Julia Migenes Johnson. Apart from Domingo, though, the principals are singing roles normally not thought of as within their vocal range – the mezzo role of Carmen is sung by a soprano, the baritone role of Escamillo by a bass-baritone, the soprano role of Michaela by mezzo, Faith Esham. Despite this unorthodoxy, it seems that the film will provide a fairly 'straight' rendering of the opera. What appears to be Rosi's interest is the study of outsiders, Carmen the gypsy and Don José the Navarrais displaced into Andalusia. He has made a film about this part of Spain before in *Il Momento della Verità* (1965), on the subject of bull-fighting. *Carmen*, made entirely on location in Andalusia, mixes, on the soundtrack, music recorded in the studio six months before, and dialogue (of which, in the tradition of the *opéra comique*, there is a considerable amount in Bizet's *Carmen*) recorded live at the time of shooting. This *Carmen*, like the *Don Giovanni* and the *Traviata* discussed above, has been produced under the aegis of Gaumont.

Gaumont burned their fingers with *Don Giovanni*. The recording used as the soundtrack of the film was released onto the record and tape market. It sold better than any other available recording of the opera, as a result of promotion for the movie. People saw the film and bought the record – and Gaumont had to watch the resulting revenue go, not to themselves, but to CBS records. They have learned from this costly mistake and have since acquired the record company, Erato, under whose label the recording of *Carmen* made for the Gaumont-produced, Rosi-directed film is being distributed. As well as a record company, Gaumont also now own a publishing house, Editions Ramsay, through whom they produced a glossy coffee-table book on *La Traviata*, full of production shots from the film to cash in on its popularity.

This kind of company integration is not designed simply to milk every possible profit from the opera film, but a necessary means of recouping the vast outlay required. A similar strategy is now followed by many of the world's leading opera houses, who are involved in making videos of some of their productions for sale to individual members of the public or to television companies. (The amount of opera made for and shown on television has, largely, fallen outside the scope of this paper, but one should be aware of the extent of it. More than one million viewers regularly tuned in to watch the several episodes into which the Wagner *Ring Cycle* was divided when shown on BBC-2 in 1982. That production, from the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, produced by Patrice Chéreau and conducted by Pierre Boulez, was a *succès de scandale* when it opened, but is now regarded as a classic.)

Spin-offs like TV rights are now part of the large opera houses' survival kit. They enable many more people to view a particular production than could possibly fit into the theatre to see it, even if that number is reduced to those who could afford the ticket prices. (Live opera is a

medium in which consumer demand traditionally exceeds the seats available, even at extremely high prices.) They also enable people to see the leading performers of the day, when reasons of health, wealth or geography would otherwise prevent them from so doing. Popular interest in opera is booming, partly fed by the re-emergence of the opera film: it provides profits for the entrepreneurs and phenomenal publicity for the performers. It may even, in its mass dissemination of the form, help to remove from opera its tag of elitest entertainment for the over-privileged few.

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4

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Brothers and Sisters

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April 30th: "Acceptable Levels" - Frontroom Film Workshop
May 7th: "Burning an Illusion" - Menelik Shabazz

May 14th: "Ghost Dance" - Ken McMullen
May 21st: "Through an Unknown Land" - Phil Mulloy

May 28th: "Brothers and Sisters" - Richard Woolley
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COMPOSING FOR THE FILMS

MANDY MERCK ASKS LINDSAY COOPER ABOUT SCORING THE INDEPENDENTS

¹*The Song of the Shirt*, directed by Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling, UK, 1979.

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS of a youthful musical career which ranged from a classical training at the Royal College of Music and the National Youth Orchestra to membership in the experimental rock group Henry Cow and participation in jazz and improvisational ensembles like the Mike Westbrook Band, Company and the Feminist Improvisation Group, Lindsay Cooper began writing film music in 1979. Since then she has combined work as a performer with composition for both recordings and the cinema—becoming an important influence on the sound of British independent film.

This May the BFI Production Board opens its much-anticipated feature, *The Gold Diggers*, at the National Film Theatre. Made by an all-women group, including writer/director Sally Potter, *The Gold Diggers* was both scored and co-scripted by Lindsay Cooper. This interview with her was conducted in March, shortly after the film was shown at the Berlin Festival.

Mandy Merck: *The Song of the Shirt*¹ was your first attempt at composing and arranging for film. I understand it was almost entirely shot, though not edited, by the time you were commissioned.

Lindsay Cooper: I think they had one or two bits of re-shooting to do and one or two sequences to shoot. I started work on the music shortly before the edit started.

Do you think you were right for it?

I think I was perfect, actually. I think that probably of all the things I've ever done, that project most aptly combined my various talents and interests.

What, for instance?

I am actually very interested in that period. I loved it at school and I've

always liked those London history research gigs where I can sit pouring over old books and old song lyrics.

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You selected the Broadside ballads that were used, and did that research yourself.

I started out with just one, I think it was the 'Cholera' song, and the setting I did of that seemed to work so well that it seemed worth spending quite a bit of time in the British Museum finding more and, sure enough, those song books were fantastic.

How would you compare composing for cinema to composing for records and performance?

The composing for records that I'd done had been pure music composing in the sense that it wasn't stuff with lyrics and although it did use one or two radical(ish) compositional techniques and arrangements, it didn't have that focused content *Song of the Shirt* did.

Do you think your work on the music track was secondary to the image track, given that most of the images had been accumulated at that point?

Yes and no. Because I went back to much the same sort of sources that the images had come from, I think the music grew out of those historical sources in a parallel way to how the images grew out of those historical sources. So, though some of the music did come directly from the images, there was also this sense of it having grown up alongside it – which you don't get in a lot of films.

How much were the images edited around the music rather than the music composed and arranged around specific sequences and the image track?

There were certain things that I'd actually recorded before they started any of the editing, like that whole sequence of the French Revolution, 'The Chartists' Anthem', 'Cholera'. I'd seen the sort of material they were going to shoot so I knew what it was going to be about and I'd seen the images, but I had no idea how they were going to cut it and in fact what they did was cut it totally to the music.

*I don't think it's that parallel to the music. In some ways the music works more ironically than in **Gold Diggers**². I've been looking at writings about film music and one critic, Claudia Gorbman, compares a notion of conventional filmic discourse, which she describes as representational, 'naturalistic' and rhythmically irregular, to conventional music – non-representational, 'lyrical' and rhythmically regular.³ But you'd worked in a musical discourse which was not particularly lyrical and not particularly rhythmically regular, you'd never worked in any kind of four-four tradition except very occasionally. So you were taking an avant-garde music tradition*

²*The Gold Diggers*, directed by Sally Potter, UK (British Film Institute), 1984.

³Claudia Gorbman, 'Narrative Film Music', *Yale French Studies* no 60, 'Cinema/Sound' issue, p 185.

⁴Babette Mangolte,
who also directed
*What Maisie
Knew*.

to what was equally an avant-garde film, but they weren't neatly in parallel were they?

No, because I don't think that I came from a pure avant-garde tradition. The tradition I come from has got a lot of lyrical elements in it. Although I may have done things like fairly esoteric improvisational work I am also trained as a classical musician, and all that London street music that I was drawing on is certainly not part of any avant-garde tradition.

*For somebody who's fairly interested in the musical avant-garde, you were really uninterested at that time in a film avant-garde. In fact you fell asleep in Akerman's *News from Home*...*

You bet.

...just a few years before you worked with the woman⁴ who shot it.

I was also in a deep coma in *What Maisie Knew*. There are certain elements of avant-garde film-making that I really don't like very much, that I do find rather boring and I think that's true about music as well. A lot of purist avant-garde music making I find grimly dull and tedious. I don't think there is that much discrepancy between my thoughts and feelings about avant-garde music making and avant-garde film-making.

*Well what did you make of the rushes of *Song of the Shirt* then?*

I was quite excited by them, though the particular kind of techniques they were working on, like the different small screen stuff and the grainy image stuff, I hadn't seen before and I thought it was quite a good way of presenting what they were trying to present about history. I found them easier to understand than the finished film, which did get a bit dense and impenetrable in parts, because a lot of those techniques did not serve clarity of presentation. When I saw them at the rushes stage they were very interesting. I'm not sure that this comes across in the finished film.

It seemed very important at the time that the music for that film be more than simply illustrative or evocative, and although you did use contemporary lyrics from the Broadside ballads and from established songs like 'Stitch Goes the Needle' and 'The Song of the Shirt', you wrote many of your own settings. Were any of the songs in the final version traditional settings?

'The Song of the Shirt' was fairly close to its 1840 setting. I changed the piano part a bit and added a cello part, but that was pretty close to its original. The 'Chartist Anthem' was also fairly close and 'The Chanson des Paysans' melody was the same. And the 'Parliament Catch' was as it appeared in an 1840s music magazine, although I doubt if they would have had a voice like Phil Minton's performing it, so in fact it did change because of its performance.



This is to say that you were composing a score out of small discrete formal elements called songs. Would you have rather, in retrospect, done a sort of symphonic or orchestrated score in a more traditional sense, that didn't rely formally on those sub-sections so much?

Above, from the 'Women's Wrongs' sequence in *The Song of the Shirt*.

No, not really. I think I got to grips with some of the broader canvas style approach with the 'Women's Wrongs' sequence. It was a four-part piece of music that used the same elements which were developed and were given deliberately different arrangements, different groups of instruments were used for each episode and different treatments of the themes were used.

Is that the one based on the novel about the Fallen Woman?

Yes.

So that was where you used a developed, more abstract series of musics?

In one sense it was abstract and in another sense it was actually quite narrative. I did follow what was going on in the story fairly closely. Even down to when she sings 'Women Go to the Ball' and then you hear a waltz, and when she sees the young man playing his flute in the evening you hear a flute, so it's narrative – although some of the harmonies and arrangements are not what one associates with narrative romantic film music at all.

There are lots of moments, when you're illustrative in that sense, or literal, it's as a joke. There's a passage where some ducks paddle across a weir and you put in a sort of duck call with a woodwind instrument: it seems like a piss-take of that kind of film music.

Not only a piss-take of that kind of film music, it's a piss-take of that kind of avant-garde pip squeak playing that wind instrumentalists often do. Bringing the water birds and the modern oboe together was quite deliberately cynical.

*Given **Song of the Shirt**'s attention to melodrama as a mode of sadistic pleasure, rather than an uncomplicated exposition of women's suffering, how did you treat the melodramatic quality of the ballads themselves?*

For 'Stitch Goes the Needle' I took the words pretty much at their face value. They're not great words, but I think the person who wrote them probably spoke from the heart about what a dreadful time needlewomen were having. So I went along with that, because where I was using it in the film was very much juxtaposed to the image. The image was the rich household and the almost sadistic excitement of this new dress being fitted, so it was quite appropriate to juxtapose this with a straightforward, rather poignant setting.

So the juxtaposition of the songs of the sequence was ironic?

Exactly.

I was getting at the choice of Sally Potter as the singer, because she seems to use her voice in an over-the-top or ironic way sometimes quite deliberately. Was that intentional?

It was probably that I wanted a good singer who could handle those weird time signatures and that kind of thing, who didn't have an immediately placeable voice within a genre like an obvious jazz or classical singer and Sally I'd worked with an enormous amount.

In the Feminist Improvisation Group?

Yes. And being a film-maker herself, being interested in film, she was the obvious choice. I don't think the kind of things her voice ended up doing and the kinds of meanings they create were quite as conscious as all that.

I remember the recording of the soundtrack album, and she was singing a passage from 'Chanson des Paysans' and she kept saying that she was trying to get a Piaf-style roll at the back of her throat, that sort of phlegmy sound, an effect that wasn't just French but was an image of what we thought French singing sounded like. So she seems to have co-operated quite closely at

some dramatic level.

We did work at getting the right voice for that song. I've worked with a small selection of singers, and one thing that they're all great at doing is producing different voices which are appropriate for the occasion and the song. If you're setting words you sing along to check that they fit okay, but nothing really prepares you for how the singers transform the song.

*I was interested in how you compare scoring a total work like **Song of the Shirt** or **Gold Diggers** or Leeds Animation's **Give Us a Smile**⁵ to contributing one or more pieces to an ensemble of musics like **So that you can live**⁶ or **Veronica 4 Rose**⁷ or **Green Flutes**⁸?*

It is very different. A lot of it is structural problems, because if you're doing a whole film you have to keep a vastly complicated series of structures in your brain all the time and that doesn't apply if you're just doing a snippet here and a snippet there. Also, if you're doing a whole score, you tend to be much much more involved in the whole process and you're taking much more responsibility and initiative in the identity of the whole thing. If it's just providing some music for something, the gig is much more talking with the film-maker, getting at what people want and trying to provide that.

*You once said that you were unhappy with the music track of **So that you can live** and its use of your own piece.*

I think they were very worried about music and this came across in the film, in that they used too many different kinds of music in an over-anxious way. It kept coming in and going out and coming back in not a very rhythmical way, in the sense of an overall rhythm.

It's been argued that the film is too punctual in the way it uses a very elegaic music over images that seem patently elegaic as well, when there are more contradictions than pure nostalgia in the narrative.⁹ How would you have dealt with that?

I think I'm quite an elegiac composer as well. I don't think I could have written a tune that would have fitted better. I don't know what sort of music would have fitted better. I don't know what sort of music would have worked actually. Maybe no music at all.

*Is **Gold Diggers** the only film where you've worked on the script¹⁰ as well as the music?*

Yes.

Do you think that's necessarily productive? I ask because there is a notion in

⁵*Give Us a Smile*, Leeds Animation Workshop, UK, 1983.

⁶*So that you can live*, Cinema Action, UK, 1981.

⁷*Veronica 4 Rose*, directed by Melanie Chait, UK (Channel 4), 1983.

⁸*Green Flutes*, directed by Nancy Scheisari, UK (Channel 4), 1984.

⁹See Sue Aspinall and Mandy Merck, 'So that you can live, II', *Screen* Sept-Oct 1982, vol 23 nos 3-4, p 160.

¹⁰ The script was co-written by Lindsay Cooper, Rose English and Sally Potter.

theories about film music that a contrapuntal score is better than a parallelistic score, although anybody who thinks about that for very long has to challenge that crude dichotomy. It seems to coincide with David Ilic's review of the two soundtrack albums¹¹ recently: he finds the music in *Song of the Shirt* in some sense sterner and stiffer, the words he uses are 'dour' and 'oppressive' which are mood music words. 'Harder hitting' is another term he uses and he says the *Gold Diggers* music is too light. The implication is that if the music had contradicted the lightness of the scenario a bit it would have been more interesting.

I know for a fact that he hasn't seen the film. For all he knows, it might be the most miserable, wretched, oppressive film in which the score is indeed working at absolute counterpoint.

So he's just reviewing them as two sets of soundtrack albums?

As two albums, basically.

*Do you think the **Song of the Shirt** music was more integrated than **Gold Diggers**?*

Gold Diggers works better as a film score, and *Rags* (the title of *The Song of the Shirt* LP) makes a better album than it did a film score. It appears much more centred and integrated as an album, because of the film's length, and because of the immensity of material that one's being presented with in the film. *Gold Diggers* is more tightly constructed and the music better integrated. There are fewer core themes. I was working from a very small number of musical ideas and themes, whereas *The Song of the Shirt* was more disparate. All the songs are different, they come from musical ideas to do with those lyrics. It's only really in 'Women's Wrongs' and one or two other cases that melodic ideas interlock. Whereas in *The Gold Diggers* there are endless cross references. You'll get two themes that have been heard elsewhere in different contexts suddenly juxtaposed, or you'll hear a totally different arrangement of something or you'll hear a snippet of something that came at the beginning coming in over the top of something else.

So that's what you mean when you say that there's a developing musical form?

Yes, and a lot of these cross references and relations aren't consciously perceived by the listener, but I'm pretty sure that they're perceived unconsciously. People seem to like the music and I think a lot of what they're liking is an unconscious taking in of the fact that it does work as a unity, and that there aren't any kind of inconsequential things happening on the musical level.

*In your notes on **Song of the Shirt** you make what seem like disparaging*

remarks about the function of conventional film music. You imply that an emotional function is what's most conventional about film music and what you're in some sense trying to challenge.¹²

¹² See p 7 of the booklet accompanying the *Rags* LP.

If I appeared to be implying that then I didn't mean to. The tradition that film music has of moving people I completely admire, and want to be part of. There are different ways of moving people like me, and obviously I'm much more interested in the way that music can work when it can both move you and engage the brain as well.

You don't think those are incompatible?

No, and I certainly wouldn't want ever to turn my back on that tradition of movie music that brings tears to the eyes.

How do you deal with the easy, patent way that certain forms of music overlaid on something can produce an effect that another form of music would not?

It's a narrow line that one treads, and I have to admit that a lot of the time I do it by intuition, if that's not a dreadful word to use in your comic. If one wants to make an emotional impact as well as making an intelligent point, I don't see why one should have to shy away from that and deliberately do something where it is impossible to get emotionally involved.

I was in the studio today remixing some of the music that I did for *Green Flutes* for this record I'm working on and I found myself wondering about that, because it was an extremely sad tune. There's a slow pan through a bleak housing estate, and I wasn't sure about doing a tune which was obviously tragic, but I think it works. The content of the music could be said to be quite lyrical, but the arrangement I used was utterly uncompromising, it wasn't a kind of nineteenth century romantic arrangement. It was a very 1980s bleak, mean, drums/bass guitar/guitar. It's those kind of things you've got to look at as well as just the tunes.

*In what sense would you say that **Gold Diggers** is a musical? Colette Laffont sings one number, Julie Christie dances in the waltz scene, Colette never dances, I don't think. So although there is a centrality of song and dance to its action and ideas, as you point out in your press notes, in what sense would you call it a musical?*

I'd call it a paired-down musical in that the way that the film achieves its whole effect is very musical – not just the fact that there is a lot of music and it works very well with the film, but I think the way the film is cut is very musical. Not just that it's cut to the music, but the rhythm of Sally's cutting. It's probably got a lot to do with the fact that she is a musician as well as a film-maker.

What do you think about Eisenstein's notion of working very closely with the musical form and paralleling his montage sequences to bars, etc?

Well, Eisenstein and Prokofiev really work as a partnership, but an exceptional one. Straight narrative cinema has rules about cutting which work at a different pace to a film that was using musical criteria, rather faster and with a different sense of rhythm. Sally's cutting in *The Gold Diggers* acknowledges the plurality of rhythms in the same way that music does – plurality of both rhythm and tempo.

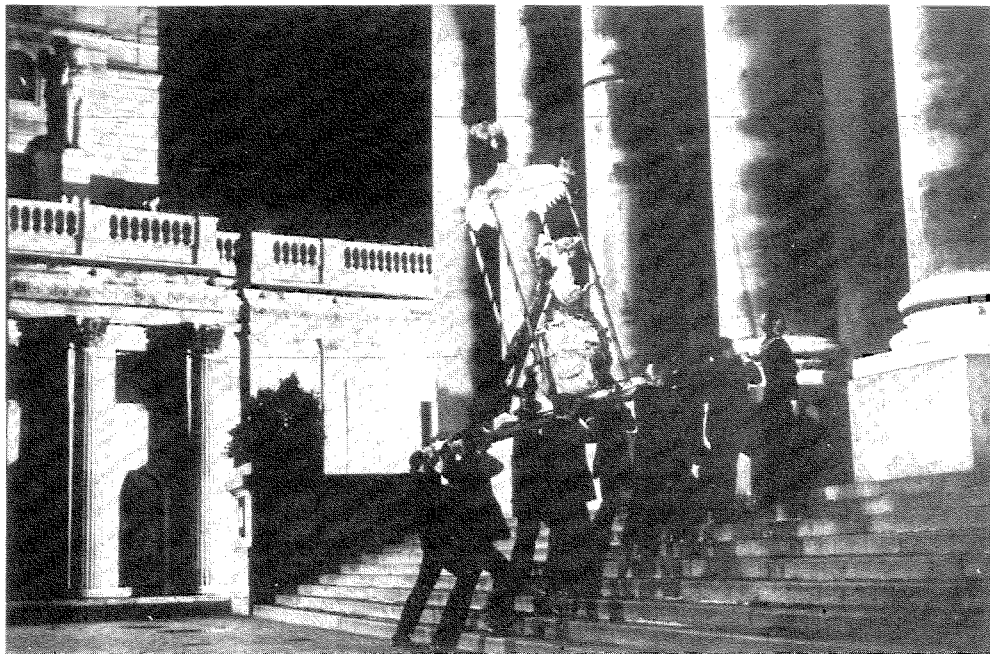
*I was thinking about the Warner Brothers musical tradition as opposed to Minnelli and others who worked at MGM. Instead of taking ordinary narrative and enacting that musically in song and dance, Warners naturalises it by making the story about performers, like the Doris Day films, so that in order to get a number into the action you have a performer singing on a stage because that's who the story's about. Performance as a mode of life is foregrounded in its problematic and joyful terms. The action isn't quite opened out into music in the same way as *Singin' in the Rain* is. *Gold Diggers* obviously is about performers and audiences and their inter-relationships.*

Yes, there are very direct references to that sort of film. The backstage scenes are really very much like that musical genre about performers.

Below, the foregrounding of performance in *The Gold Diggers*.

*Because most of us knew the film through its pre-release history under its original title **Gold**, it hadn't occurred to me to think about it in reference to*





the Busby Berkeley musicals. In *Genre and the Musical*, Rick Altman suggests that in *Gigi* both sexes are collectors, 'men collecting women and women amassing jewels'. And he goes on to say, 'This simple opposition remains important throughout the history of the American film musical, from the *Gold Diggers* series of the thirties (where man is seen as an endless source of gold, while woman is identified by her beauty) to the tongue-in-cheek extravaganzas of the fifties (e.g. Howard Hawks' 1953 *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, which turns on the simple principle: "Don't you know that a man being rich is like a girl being pretty?").'¹³ In your *Gold Diggers* there is that line in the 'Bankers Song', 'to the bank with the beauty, to the bank with the gold, both make money and neither grows old', which seems to me to be entirely within that kind of tradition. Were you thinking about that, or do you think that's just the kind of cultural coincidence that the form gives you?

We were certainly thinking those kinds of ideas about the tradition of the American film.

But it seems like the musical particularly puts together money, masculinity and beauty.

I'm not sure. I think these are present in an awful lot of Hollywood films whether they're musicals or not. Maybe it's more crudely presented in the musical. . . .

The Gold Diggers doesn't have that over-the-top, woman-as-spectacle

Above, 'to the bank with the beauty' in *The Gold Diggers*.

¹³ Rick Altman, 'The American Film Musical: Paradigmatic Structure and Mediatory Function', in Rick Altman (ed), *Genre: The Musical*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul with the British Film Institute, 1981, p 205.



Above, the waltz scene in *The Gold Diggers*.

abstraction of the action into physical geometry that Busby Berkeley uses, and presumably for good political reasons. There's very little ensemble dancing, for instance, except in the waltz scene.

I think the pared-down musical format does work for the kind of images and ideas it's dealing with.

*Dance forms dominate in **The Gold Diggers**—tangos, polkas, taps, waltzes—and the cutting is with rather than against those rhythms, by and large. Did you feel, as a sometimes free-blowing jazzier, comfortable within those strict rhythmic limitations?*

Very much so, because my musical formation was my father taking me to the Royal Festival Hall to see the ballet. I saw every show they had in their repertoire for the entire 50s. I think my progress through this film's score mirrored the Julie Christie character going back to her own past.

Doesn't that preclude one of your musical signatures, which is fooling around at the extreme end of the woodwind scale with different kinds of bassoon blips—an unusual instrument to carry a melody line or to develop a major line in a piece. You weren't really able to do that very much in this, were you?

Not a lot. The bassoons have their little moment in that long tracking shot down towards the Expert, when the Expert's assistant shows Céleste (Colette Laffont) in. But I quite liked having a rest from that sort

of stuff really. I think I've got beyond the stage of feeling that every project I do has got to contain everything that I can do, so for this one it didn't seem appropriate to include the pip-squeak. Maybe it's less easy to include that kind of thing in film score writing because one has got to be more organised and structured about it unless one's writing very freely to something that's yet to be shot.

Would you not say that film score writing in general pays more attention to the melodic line than other forms of music do, and that you, as a woodwindist and a bassoonist particularly, are stuck returning to the piano and the more soprano woodwind instruments to carry that lyrical line?

Certain writers about film music have talked about the tyranny of the melody line. I can see why over-dependence on a melody line can get oppressive, but there's a lot of pleasure to be had in crafting good tunes and I still think there's a place for them, though it is a bit much if tunes take over film scores completely, at the expense of more textural stuff which is sometimes very appropriate.

What film music have you especially liked?

My favourite film score is *Kuhle Wampe*¹⁴, which is by Hanns Eisler. I like the 'Solidarity Song' a lot, and the way it's used in lots of different versions during the film. I also like the montage sequences with those quite developed instrumental pieces. I think they work terribly well and they work against the image, which is really nice – having the song on the soundtrack as kind of commentary. I'm a great admirer of Bernard Herrmann. And Ennio Morricone is not only one of the greats but an improviser as well: it always appeals to me that he's managed to combine these two careers. And I think Nino Rota was also great. He did a lot of Fellini's stuff. Both are brilliant arrangers. I have records of theirs to films that I've never seen; I just love the arrangements and they're good tunes as well.

You've always worked with people in the independent sector, but that embraces a variety of styles. Would you be more inclined to work with experimental film-makers than with more narrative film-makers?

I don't think experimental in the abstract is what I want to go for. I'm interested in working with film-makers who have an understanding of music. Sally (Potter) is light years ahead of everybody else in that respect as far as I can make out. Not only is she a musical performer, but she's worked in other areas of performance which have used music. I think it's that which makes her a very musical film-maker, and I think it's something that other film-makers are beginning to be open to and learn about. But with the best will in the world you're not going to work out how to use music with film in a short time. It's something which takes a lot of experience. I guess it will change because people do seem to be thinking

¹⁴*Kuhle Wampe/Whither Germany?*, written by Bertolt Brecht, directed by Slatan Dudow, Germany, 1932.

¹⁵*The Fakenham Film*, directed by Susan Shapiro, UK, 1972.

more about music than they used to.

*I think there's probably more attention on the part of the independent sector to the soundtrack in general than there used to be, when you consider that sound recording was the last skill that they seemed to be able to take seriously. Think of how many soundtracks were literally impenetrable in feminist work, like *The Fakenham Film*¹⁵ in the early seventies. . . .*

What do you think is the purpose of issuing a separate soundtrack album? If you think that film music has an integral relationship with an image track, why issue a soundtrack album?

One is to acknowledge that the music does have a kind of identity of its own—it is crafted together according to musical and not just filmic criteria, and as such is worth being given a life of its own—and the other is because I'm fairly well known as a musician in the field I work in, I think it's a way of bringing that audience into film.

So you think of it more as bringing your music audience to the film, rather than bringing a film audience to your music? That suggests an extremely small audience for independent film, when you think how small the audience is for experimental music.

Yes, we are talking in minute numbers. I don't know who buys my records, but I suspect that it's more likely that people who are interested in the music will buy the records and then go and see the film, rather than people who've seen the film then start getting interested.

*In the case of **Rags**, how many LPs did you press?*

It sold 3,000, there's been another 2,000 pressed and it's now selling again. I believe it's doing quite well.

In what countries?

Europe, America, Japan. It was big in Iceland.

*How many are in the initial pressing for **Gold Diggers**?*

Well, it had a thousand and was sold out immediately, and it's had another 1,000 done and I suppose they'll just go on pressing them.

Have you ever thought of soundtrack LPs as souvenirs of the film, memorials of the experience of watching it?

No. I found it rather odd as I was standing with my little cardboard box at the back of the auditorium in Berlin, selling these *Gold Diggers* records. It was rather a strange experience to actually be there in the market place watching these people buy it, clearly as a souvenir of the film, because I haven't really thought of soundtrack albums like that.

The Gold Diggers album enables you to make a different kind of sense of the film than is available actually sitting in the cinema. Most people I talked to at the screenings found the lyrics a bit hard to follow, and not just because of Colette's problems with a French accent.

That was a mistake I made in giving her song an over-dense arrangement and not foregrounding the voice in the mix. I certainly found myself mixing Dagmar (Krause) way into the foreground yesterday when I was doing some songs for the films that Lis Rhodes and Jo Davis are doing. I did real classic singer-right-in-the-front, instruments-at-the-back style mixing, which I think is a reaction to the problems that we've had. Certainly on film tracks you've got to foreground the voice.

So what's this work with Lis Rhodes and Jo Davis?

They're making a series of teeny-weeny films for Channel 4. One minute.

And how many of those are going to be shown in a given programme together?

I think the idea is to insert them in rather the manner of adverts between programmes. . . . Whether that actually happens remains to be seen, because as we know C4 is getting a little nervous these days. They are actually rather radical. I haven't seen anything that Jo Davis has done before, but it's within the sort of work that Lis Rhodes has done and it's fairly uncompromising in the visual material, the way of presenting it and the content.

And so you're having to do units of music that are no more than a minute long, which doesn't leave much scope for a theme and a counter theme and a synthesis of any kind.

Yes, you can just about stretch to an ABA form if you really push it. I find it a rather enjoyable thing to do. We've done a mixture of me writing to stuff that's pretty much finished, stuff that's not quite finished, and then the two that I've done most recently they haven't even started shooting. It gives quite a lot of scope for both them and me – different ways of working with film and music, and of course when it's that brief it's all fairly manageable.

How many of these will there be?

I think they're making about 30. Not all of them have got music; I've done music for four, and they're already putting two of them out on record.

And you own the rights to do that? Has that always been your relationship to that kind of music, that you retain the rights?

Yes. The British Film Institute as a matter of course gives the composer copyright. It's not like the famous story about Maurice Jarre's *Doctor Zhivago* score. A French orchestra wanted to do a performance of music from it and he needed the orchestral parts. So he went to MGM asking for the score, which they owned—they owned the actual manuscript paper. And they'd thrown it away....

The Gold Diggers will be shown at the National Film Theatre in London from May 3 to 14.

Rags and *Music from the Gold Diggers* are available from Recommended Records, 583 Wandsworth Road, London SW8, £4.50 plus postage. Lindsay Cooper's forthcoming LP, *From Stage and Screen*, will include music from *Green Flutes*, *Give Us a Smile*, and various films by Lis Rhodes and Joanna Davis. It is due out at the end of May, from Recommended Records.



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THE ACOUSTIC DIMENSION

NOTES ON CINEMA SOUND
BY TOM LEVIN

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I.

'SOUNDS HAVE NO IMAGES,' writes Bela Balazs, and as a result 'the sound engineer does nothing more than record and reproduce. . . . The shape and outline of sounds cannot be changed by varying perspectives as the physiognomy of visible things can be changed by varying angles.'¹ Because claims such as this one made in 1945 continue to appear in contemporary film theory², they cannot merely be dismissed as anachronistic or technologically naive but must be investigated in terms of their philosophical presuppositions as well as their *effect*. Echoing the adoring tone of much early writing on photography which is still spell-bound by the 'objectivity' of the indexical trace, such arguments for the 'transparency' or 'neutrality' of technology invariably function to prevent, or at least delay, ideological interrogation. Is the 'recording and reproduction' of sound simply an unproblematically reduplicated presentation or is it, as will be argued, a mediation which transforms and represents its object in an altered form?

While the fallacious and facile equation of image and 'reality' can still be found in recent work on film – witness Stanley Cavell's neo-Bazinian claim that 'in a photograph the original is still as present as it ever was'³ – it is nevertheless generally acknowledged that the celluloid image, no matter how analogous it is to the retinal image, is a representation already restructured according to the formalising values of the lens, projector, film stock, etc, all of which work to establish a set of different relations and thus, in some sense, a new reality. The represented is 'read' and thus always transformed by its representation. Yet, while the critique of the cinematic technology has destroyed the myth of the 'innocent' representation, the recognition that, as Jean-Louis Comolli puts it, 'the most analogical representation of the world is still not, is never, its reduplication',⁴ does not seem to have been applied to the *acoustic* domain.

¹Bela Balazs,
• *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, New York, Dover, 1970 (reprint), p 216.

² For example in the work of Christian Metz, Stanley Cavell and Gerald Mast (see below).

³ Stanley Cavell,
The World Viewed, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1979, p 20.

⁴ Jean-Louis Comolli,
'Machines of the Visible', in Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (eds), *The Cinematic Apparatus*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1980, p 138.

⁵ Bela Balazs, op cit.

⁶ Gerald Mast, *Film/Cinema/Movie: A Theory of Experience*, New York, Harper and Row, 1977, p 216.

⁷ Stanley Cavell, op cit.

⁸ Christian Metz, 'Aural Objects', in *Yale French Studies*, no 60, 'Cinema/Sound', 1980, p 29.

⁹ Jean-Louis Baudry, 'The Apparatus', in Theresa Hak Kyung (ed) *Apparatus*, New York, Tanam Press, 1980, p 47.

¹⁰ A not unproblematic tripartite distinction which will be employed only as a methodological artifact: clearly all boundaries between the categories are at best ill-defined (noise can be musical, music noisy, dialogue musical, etc).

¹¹ Jean-Louis Baudry, op cit.

In the ideological critique of the cinematic apparatus the focus was once again on the visual at the expense of the acoustic, neglecting as a result, to submit the reproduction of sound to the scrutiny afforded the technology of the visible. But in order to understand how sound too is transformed in the process of its reproduction, the technology of the soundtrack must also be subjected to critical analysis. The following notes, drawing primarily on the work of Theodor Adorno whose writing on film and radio music offers a stimulating approach to such an investigation, will attempt to sketch the basic strategies of the critique of the acoustic apparatus in order to stimulate its further development.

Even more frequent than claims about the visual domain which collapse the distinction between photograph and the 'real' are arguments about the acoustic sphere which equate the recorded data of the cinema soundtrack with the 'original' sounds. Consider the following representative remarks:

What we hear from the screen is not an image of the sound but the sound itself, which the sound camera has recorded and reproduced again. . . . There is no difference in dimension and reality between the original sound and the recorded and reproduced sound, as there is between real objects and their photographic images.

(Bela Balazs⁵)

There is clearly a difference between a filmed object or action (it is a photograph of the thing or act) and a recorded musical sound. For [the latter] is the sound itself. There is no ontological difference between hearing a violin in a concert hall and hearing it on a sound track in a movie theater.

(Gerald Mast⁶)

Sound can be perfectly copied . . . even if a photograph were a copy of an object, so to speak, it would not bear the relation to its object that a recording bears to the sound it copies. . . . The record reproduces its sound but we cannot say that a photograph reproduces a sight (or a look or an experience).

(Stanley Cavell⁷)

Auditory aspects, providing that the recording is well done, undergo no appreciable loss in relation to the corresponding sound in the real world: in principle, nothing distinguishes a gunshot heard in a film from a gunshot heard on the street.

(Christian Metz⁸)

In cinema—as in the case of all talking machines—one does not hear an image of the sounds but the sounds themselves. . . . They are reproduced, not copied.

(Jean-Louis Baudry⁹)

Even more interesting than the striking similarity of these quotations is the fact that on the rare occasion when such a diverse group of film theorists seems to agree, their shared claim is mistaken! As a closer examination of the statements reveals, all of them make essentially the same point: since a recorded soundtrack is not recognised as a recording in the way an image is readily distinguished as a representation, sound—be it

music (the violin), noise (the gunshot) or dialogue¹⁰—must not be affected by the recording process and is therefore indistinguishable from and even ontologically identical with its ‘original’. While this claim is erroneous, as will be shown, it is based on the *correct* observation that there *is* a difference in the relation of the ‘copy’ to the ‘original’ in the visual and the acoustic domains. But why does the reproduced sound seem less like a copy? If, as a working definition, sound is understood as ‘mechanical radiant energy that is transmitted by longitudinal pressure waves in a material medium (as air)’ (Webster), then the materiality of a sonic event consists of this entire vibrating volume. This is also the case for the reproduced sound. Now, whereas an object loses its three-dimensionality when represented in the photographic image, the recorded sound, considered as a volume of vibrating air waves, remains three-dimensional after mechanical mediation. The difference between the copies of acoustic and visual information is, as both Balazs and Metz recognised, that the reproduction of sound suffers *no* dimensional loss in the process. But is this sufficient to *equate* the copied sound with the ‘original’ and to argue that there is no difference *at all* between them? While still insisting that acoustic reproductions are ‘real’, Baudry is the only one to acknowledge explicitly that ‘the procedure for recording the sounds and playing them back deforms them’.¹¹ Metz, taken as representative of the position of the others, insists that ‘the sounds of a film spread out into space as do sounds in real life, or almost’.¹² What is at stake in this concluding qualification? What kind of acoustic transformations are implied in this ‘or almost’ and why are such differences in the reproduced sound so consistently ignored?

According to Baudry’s phonocentrist explanation it is quite simply that ‘voice does not lend itself to games of illusion, or confusion between the real and its figurativity, to which sight seems particularly liable (because voice cannot be represented figuratively).’¹³ But why should figuration (read: representation) be limited exclusively to the domain of the visual? Metz explains that it is because ‘we experience the representations of objects as *reproductions* by implied *référence* to tactility, the supreme arbiter of “reality”’.¹⁴ Since, for Metz ‘touch is traditionally the very criteria [sic] of materiality’,¹⁵ as a result, anything that cannot be touched ‘cannot encompass two degrees of phenomenal reality, the “real” and the copy’.¹⁶ Once materiality is defined in terms of tactility the intangibility of the acoustic precludes figuration, that is, any distinction between the reproduction and the ‘original’. This in turn leads to the conclusion that recorded sound, because in these terms it is not a copy, is identical with ‘live’ sound.¹⁷

That acoustic reproductions are indistinguishable from their ‘originals’ is a very problematic claim. Not only is a poor recording often recognised as a copy (even by non-musicians), but there are various non-tactile modalities in which the ‘real’ can be distinguished from the ‘copy’—artificial rose scent by its odour, fake orange juice by its taste, Philip K Dick’s androids by their inability to empathise, etc. Indeed, most trained ears can easily differentiate a synthesised ‘copy’ of an instrument from a

¹² Christian Metz, op cit, p 29, note 7.

¹³ Jean-Louis Baudry, op cit.

¹⁴ Christian Metz, *Film Language*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974, p 9.

¹⁵ Christian Metz, ‘Aural Objects’ op cit, p 28.

¹⁶ Christian Metz, *Film Language*, op cit, p 8.

¹⁷ The soundtrack as a ‘realisation’ of sound as opposed to the image which is a ‘representation’ is a distinction remarkably analogous to the equally problematic dichotomy of ‘performative’ and ‘constative’ utterances proposed (and ultimately abandoned) by J L Austin. A different critique of the image/sound distinction could take its cue from Austin’s discussion of quotation as undermining the rigid separation of the terms he coined.

¹⁸ Christian Metz,
Langage et Cinéma,
Paris, Librairie
Larousse, 1971, p
209.

¹⁹ Christian Metz,
Film Language, op
cit.

²⁰ Joseph and
Barbara Anderson,
'Motion
Perception in
Motion Pictures',
in *The Cinematic
Apparatus*, op cit,
pp 76-105.

²¹ Christian Metz,
Film Language, op
cit.

'live' sound. What is at stake in Metz' curious statement that recorded sounds are 'real'? The fact that another formulation of this claim begins with the phrase 'for the naive ear'¹⁸ seems to confirm the suspicion that Metz (and by extension also the other theorists cited above) have made false ontological generalisations from isolated phenomenological observations ('it seems real to me' becomes 'it *is* real').

Metz' definition of materiality as tactility leads him to claim that *motion* in the cinema is also 'real': 'the strict distinction between object and copy, however, dissolves on the threshold of motion. Because movement is *never* material but is *always* visual, *to reproduce its appearance is to duplicate its reality*'¹⁹ (my emphases). What does this mean? It is well known that the cinematic image does *not* move: according to perceptual psychologists the experience of *apparent motion* occurs despite the fact that the stimuli (a series of still images) themselves do not move. Unlike *real motion* in which an object moving from point A to B stimulates all intermediate points on the retina, apparent motion is perceived despite the *lack* of stimuli on these intermediate points.²⁰ The experience of motion in the cinema is thus a production of a *perceptual transformation*. While apparent motion is *phenomenologically* indistinguishable from real motion, the fact remains that, for this effect of movement to be experienced at all, the only actual movement of the film – that of the celluloid through the projector – must be rendered invisible by the cinematic apparatus. A phenomenological observation is thus almost always blind to the activity of the technology producing the effect to which it is responding. Such a phenomenological stance is incompatible with an analysis which seeks to understand and critique the ideological effects of the technology.

Metz' phenomenological agenda is revealed in another symptomatic formulation in which he claims that 'the objects and the characters we see in a film are apparently only effigies, but their motion is not the effigy of motion – it *seems* real'²¹ (my emphasis). Parallel to the opposition of image (a copy) and sound (not copied, but 'real'), Metz here differentiates between the image and movement. However, instead of the usual claim that motion *is* real he writes that it *seems* real. This is a quite different and much less controversial claim. The rhetorical effect of calling cinema sound or movement 'real' instead of describing it as a convincing representation is to render superfluous any analysis of transformations that might have occurred in the process of reproduction. The translation of phenomenological observations into ontological claims thus serves to perpetuate the ideological activity of a representational practice by holding it immune from critique.

Instead of the uncritical phenomenological narrative which explains the technological history of cinema as the successive addition of 'real' movement and 'real' sound, an alternative approach would read this development in terms of a complicated alternation of *supplementation and lack*: the advent of a new technique such as sound strengthens the impression of reality while simultaneously presenting new threats to it. Abandoning the myopic trust in perception such an approach takes seri-

²² Jean-Louis
Comolli, op cit, p
140.

ously the mechanism of disavowal, recognising that any reality effect of any fiction

*always depends on its self-designation as such, on the fact that its fictive character is human and recognized from the start, that it presents itself as an artificial arrangement, that it does not hide that it is above all an apparatus of deception.*²²

The cinema, site of innumerable technological achievements which eliminated seeming obstacles to its 'realism' in fact owes the success of its illusion not only to this catalogue of verisimilitude but to its artificiality.

II.

'In the universal silence of the image the fragments of a broken vase could talk exactly the way a character "talked" to his neighbor.'²³ If for Rudolf Arnheim the stasis and silence of the still photograph were to be read as an utopian dissolving of the distinctions between the live and the inert, the near and the far, the mute and the voiced, the same image could also be read as terrifying evidence of reification – man reduced to the status of a silent and static thing. A similar tension plagues the silent film as well: with the advent of the 'moving picture' which destroyed the unity of stasis while maintaining that of silence, the 'live' quality of the moving figures was immediately at odds with their 'deadly' silence. In an utopian reading this silence could be understood as a liberation from language considered as the discourse of oppression: Hofmannsthal, for example, notes that for workers seeking refuge in the cinema 'the fact that these images are silent is an even further attraction; they are silent like dreams. And deep down, without realizing it, these people fear language, they fear in language the mechanism of society.'²⁴ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, on the other hand, read the silence of the moving figures as evidence of the *decay* of language and as an indictment of the estrangement created by commodity culture: 'at the sight of the gesticulating masks the people recognized themselves as just such beings, alienated from themselves and not far from being struck dumb.'²⁵ Walter Benjamin, who did not refrain from criticising the cinema despite his conviction of its utopian possibilities, describes the silent continuity of the strictly discontinuous images as analogous to the sequence of autonomous tasks on the assembly line: 'both probably appeared at the same time historically. The social significance of the one cannot be understood apart from that of the other.'²⁶ In a similar vein, Guy Debord reads in the very structure of the silent spectacle the fragmentation of the capitalist order: 'the world at once present and absent which the spectacle makes visible is the world of the commodity . . . the visible negation of life, a negation of life which has become visible.'²⁷ If the temporality of the photograph is fundamentally *past* (Barthes' 'there then'), a trace of

²³ Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1957, p 186.

²⁴ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'The Substitute for Dreams', *Prosa* Bd. IV, 1921, p 45 ff.

²⁵ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Komposition fuer den Film*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976, p 75. (Although first published in English as *Composing for the Films*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947, the study was written in German 'for translation into the American'; for further discussion of its complicated publication history see the preface and editorial postscript to the German edition cited above.)

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* Bd. I, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980, p 1040.

²⁷ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit, Black and Red, 1977, p 37.

²⁸ Christian Metz,
Film Language, op
cit, p 7.

²⁹ *ibid*, p 8.

³⁰ Roger Manvell
and John Hunty,
*The Technique of
Film Music*, New
York, Hastings
House, 1957, pp
20-22.

³¹ Kurt London,
*Film Music: A
Summary*,
London, Faber
and Faber, 1936, p
27.

³² Theodor Adorno
and Hanns Eisler,
op cit.

³³ *ibid*.

³⁴ Because the
translation of this
essay which
appears in
Illuminations,
Hanna Arendt
(ed), New York,
Schocken Books,
1969, p 217-252 is
unusable, I refer
the reader to the
announced
retranslation by
Joel Snyder,
forthcoming in
Critical Inquiry.

a prior presence which is now past, then it is no wonder that the movement of these shadows might have appeared eerie—for what else but spirits can be visible, moving and absent?

Because for Metz movement is simply 'real' his analysis concentrates on the 'reality' of the moving images: 'motion imparts corporeality to objects and gives them an autonomy their still representations could not have; it draws them from their flat surfaces to which they were confined. . . . Movement gives us volume and volume suggests life.'²⁸ As usual Metz immediately qualifies this claim in a footnote where he admits that the volume which is imparted by movement is 'of course minus one of the three spatial dimensions in which it usually unfolds I simply mean an acceptable equivalent for volume. The problem of volume is vast [!] and complex.'²⁹ But even if it is granted that movement suggests life by *suggesting* volume, how can Metz account for the fact that the advent of movement seems to have foregrounded the artificiality of the moving images, their *lack* of volume and particularly their lack of *sound*? Scholars of the soundtrack have regularly noted that the impression of movement in the early cinema appeared unnatural and freakish without some sort of acoustic correlate to the visual activity.³⁰ Why?

According to a traditional account, film music

*began not as a result of any artistic urge but from the dire need of something which would drown out the noise made by the projector. For in those times there were as yet no sound-absorbent walls between the projection machine and the auditorium. This painful noise disturbed visual enjoyment to no small extent. Instinctively cinema proprietors had recourse to music, and it was the right way, using an agreeable sound to neutralize one less agreeable.*³¹

This seemingly plausible narrative raises as many questions as it answers. Why, for example, did the projection noise disturb the spectacle? Was it, as Adorno/Eisler speculate, that the mechanical buzz was perceived as an acoustic correlate of the technological alienation which was frightening in the silent images?³² Or was it that the live musicians functioned as an antidote to the 'dead' images? The continued popularity of music even when mechanically reproduced seems to indicate that the appeal of the music had more to do with the character of the sounds themselves. Why then was music so 'instinctively' agreeable? Was it the 'high-art' status of certain musical genres such as the symphony which functioned to grant cultural validity to the technological images? What, in short, was the effect of the acoustic supplement?

According to Adorno/Eisler, music rendered the terrifying spectacle of the moving spectres less frightening: 'the "magical" function of music consisted in pacifying the evil spirits in the unconscious perception [of film].'³³ Appearing only two pages after a reference to Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility',³⁴ this connection of music with cult ritual practice—a central concept in the discussion of aura—could be read as an indication that the addition of music has an 'auratic' effect. Consider Adorno/Eisler's claim that music

*gives film a nearness similar to the film's own creation of proximity through the close-up. It attempts to establish a layer of human mediation between the reeled-off photographs and the spectators. Its social function is that of cement: [film music] binds together elements which would otherwise oppose each other unrelated – the mechanical product and the spectators as well as the spectators among themselves It seeks, after the fact, to breathe into pictures some of the life that photography has taken away from them.*³⁵

The insistence that sound gives back to the photographed images that which they lost in the process of mechanical reproduction must be read against the background of a passage from Luigi Pirandello's novel *Si Gira* cited in section IX of Benjamin's essay, in which the loss of aura is described in terms of the actor's experience in front of the camera. He is overcome by an inexplicable emptiness which results from his being robbed of 'his reality, his life, his *voice* and the *sounds* he makes when he moves, only to be transformed into a *mute* image which flickers momentarily on the screen and then disappears into *silence* . . . '³⁶ (my emphases). It is no accident that the vocabularies of being (reality, life) and the acoustic (voice, sound, mute, silence) are linked by contiguity: loss of voice implies loss of being or presence and loss of presence is, for Benjamin, the hallmark of the destruction of aura. Whereas Benjamin foresees the re-introduction of the aura through the fabrication of the personality cult of the 'star', Adorno/Eisler imply that an aura-effect, (which one could call an 'A-effect', understood as the polar opposite of Brecht's term) is already produced by the addition of the acoustic dimension.

In its privileging of sight over sound as the guarantor of the 'real', the early cinema was read by Adorno and others as the latest in a series of representational practices which manifest the epistemological privileging of the visual which is characteristic of western culture. According to Adorno, vision is the primary modality through which the highly industrialised bourgeois order gained power: where reality is defined as a collection of 'things' (commodities) the eye is trained to distinguish and identify objects and is active, selective and definite. Hearing, on the other hand, does not differentiate in the same way and is considered passive and indefinite. In the face of technology hearing is 'archaic'. Acoustic perception, Adorno/Eisler write, can be understood as a type of regression to a pre-individualistic (cultic?) collectivity which resists the purposive rationalisation of the commodity culture: 'one could say that to react primarily with the unselfconscious ear rather than with the alert eye is, in a certain sense, to contradict the later industrial age and its anthropology.'³⁷ If the industrial age is paradigmatically the era of technical reproduction and the constitutive feature of technical reproduction is, in turn, its lack of a unique existence in time and place, then according to the Benjaminian turn in Adorno/Eisler's argument, the loss of aura in the image is symptomatic of the industrial age. Sound, if it is to contradict this age, must somehow retain a vestige of that unique existence in time and place and indeed, just as Metz and others have recognised, sound *does* have a different relation to time and space than the

³⁵ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, op cit, pp 61-62 (English p 59).

³⁶ Luigi Pirandello, *Si Gira*, quoted by Leon Pierre-Quint, 'Signification du cinéma', *L'Art Cinématographique*, II, Paris 1927, p 14-15.

³⁷ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, op cit, p 29 (English p 20).

³⁸ See, for example, Claude Bailblé, 'Le Son: Programmation de l'écoute' *Cahiers du Cinéma*, April 1979, no 298, p 25.

³⁹ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, op cit, p 30 (English p 21).

⁴⁰ Theodor Adorno, 'The Radio Symphony' in Paul F Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton (ed), *Radio Research 1941*, New York, Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1941, p 119.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p 61 (English p 59).

image, it has a *spatial* dimension.

While various theorists have recognised that sound adds a third dimension to the flat screen³⁸, Adorno/Eisler go further and relate this volumetric aspect of the acoustic to its A-effect: 'the direct relationship to the collective which is so intrinsic to the phenomenon [of sound] itself is probably related to the spatial depth, to the feeling of being encompassed that envelops the individual, which is common to all music'.³⁹ What is decisive, however, is whether this acoustic A-effect in the cinema is taken as evidence for the mediated or for the *unmediated* character of the recorded soundtrack. Sound exists only *in time* (there is no acoustic equivalent to the freeze frame) and sound exists only *in space*. Indeed, if sound is understood as a volume of vibrating air then, assuming for the moment that sound reproduction were absolutely flawless (which it is by no means), such a 'perfect' reproduction of sound waves in a different volume would effectively constitute a *different* sound. As a result Adorno argues that all symphonies become chamber pieces when heard on the radio in the home.⁴⁰ That a gunshot *seems* to sound the same in the different acoustic spaces of the street and the inside of a cinema is a deception: if differences remain unnoticed this is a function of a socially constructed auditory practice which emphasises the similarity of such sounds in order that they can be understood (i.e. linked to a common source) by the hearer. In its three-dimensionality sound thus seems more directly tied to the space of its occurrence, its 'here and now', even when the sound is mechanically reproduced. It is in this sense that Adorno/Eisler hold, in response to Benjamin, that sound contributes an A-effect to film which was lost in the photographic process. But, whereas Metz and others go on to conclude that sound is untransformed by the reproductive technology, Adorno/Eisler recognise that the volumetric character of the acoustic implies precisely the *opposite*: the spatial specificity which gives sound its A-effect (i.e. the fact that sounds are always different in different spaces) means that the reproduced sound is *always different* from the original. Such an understanding of the acoustic A-effect, however, is not only far from that of the naive phenomenologists, it remains inaccessible to them due to the presuppositions of their methodology.

With the advent of sound the paradigmatically un-audatic images were supplemented by not only a third dimension but also by the A-effect which they so lacked. The status of film music as a response to a *lack* is already evident, Adorno/Eisler point out, in the function of its antecedents, the music of nineteenth century opera and theatre which was performed 'while the spectator is facing the stage without seeing any life, when the curtain is down or during a scene change: the between-the-acts-music. Film music represents the universalized concept of between-the-acts-music but employed also and precisely where there is something to see.'⁴¹ In its relation to the uncanny movement of the frozen images, film music acts not as a duplication but as a stimulus of the motion, providing momentum and corporeality. The pervasiveness of film music in the early cinema cannot be explained as simply an increase in 'realism' since the daily life scenes portrayed were in reality rarely accompanied by

strings! Rather, film music supplied the spatiality implied but not realised by the animation of the image through the acoustic A-effect which was based on the (dimensional) *difference* of sound and image.

The history of the development of cinema sound can thus be read as an oscillation between its difference understood as supplement and its difference understood as threat. In early cinema with live accompaniment the material heterogeneity of the visual and the acoustic was further emphasised by the presence of the live performers. However, if the musicians posed a threat to the image by foregrounding its lifelessness this was eliminated by the use of recorded sound since the critical *depth* of the acoustic was not lost through mechanical mediation. Now the heterogeneity of the visual and the acoustic is contained entirely within the realm of the technological. But even in the relation of recorded sound to recorded image the imbalance remains: because of the A-effect (the *seeming* lack of mediation) sound is perceived as more present than the image. Adorno/Eisler insist, however, that this difference be employed as a way of foregrounding the *mediated* character of the visual register. While stressing, as will be shown, that the reproduced sound is by no means unaltered (despite the A-effect), they point out that its *lack* of dimensional loss can be used to highlight the transformations that occur in the photographic process. The acoustic supplement threatens to discredit and even displace the visual domain it was meant to support and strengthen!

The primacy of *speech* in the soundtrack today can in turn be read as a means by which the image reasserts its hegemony over the acoustic. Because, according to the logic of the 'sound hermeneutic'⁴² sounds always pose the question of their source, the extra-diegetic status of most film music poses a threat to the image which can be overcome by simply diegeticising the acoustic. This is most readily effected through the introduction of voice. By locating the source of sounds *within* the image or the diegesis, sound is once again subordinated to the visual. At the same time, by focusing attention on the image, the effect of the acoustic 'enigma' is to shift an analytic gaze *away* from the activity of the sound technology which can subsequently function with even less risk of exposure. The attempt to unite sound and image necessarily denies the specificity of the acoustic and the visual domains and thereby obscures the incompatibility of these media. In a sense, Adorno argues, cinema's internal antagonism is not to be 'overcome' in this manner but should be recognised as an accurate symptom of a culture whose members are alienated from themselves. The attempt to embellish the visual with the A-effect of the acoustic is a denial of the mediated and non-auratic status of the image and of sound as well. Using the term in its most pejorative sense, Adorno/Eisler insist that 'the effects in which image and music are directly united are inevitably "auratic"—in truth already degenerate forms of aura in which the magic of the here and now has been technologically manipulated.'⁴³ The A-effect of the cinema is always already a product of a fundamentally *non-auratic* technology which serves to maintain the semblance of the auratic in order to camouflage its own activity.

⁴² Rick Altman, 'Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventri-loquism' in *Yale French Studies*, no 60, 'Cinema/Sound', 1980, p 76.

⁴³ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, op cit, p 72 (English p 72).

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p 76 (English p 77).

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p 77 (English p 78).

But even in the most 'auratic' match of recorded sound with a synchronised image there arises a tension: the closer word and image are coupled the greater the *contrast* between them becomes manifest. Indeed Adorno/Eisler claim that 'the fundamental differences between speech and image are registered in the viewer's unconscious and the insistent unity of the sound film which poses as the seamless re-duplication of the external world in all its elements, is experienced as fraudulent and fractured.'⁴⁴ In a 'talkie' which employs only speech and almost no music the muteness of the image is as foregrounded, according to Adorno/Eisler, as in a silent film. The attempt to totalise the A-effect fails (and this is equally the case for the 'magical' use of music in film): 'at the moment of greatest unity the relation of music and image is antithetical'.⁴⁵ Film contains the antidote to its own lie. Adorno/Eisler conclude that *montage* is the only relation which does justice to the difference of sound and image.

If the disavowal mechanism which is essential to the experience of cinematic illusion involves the recognition of *both* the verisimilitude *and* the artificiality of the representation, then music could be regarded as providing both the 'realistic' components of movement and depth as well as the necessary 'anti-realist' aspect of its non-representational presence. Just as the projection of the images must efface the differences between them for the effect of realism to take place, so too does the cinema depend upon the material heterogeneity or difference of sound which it employs in the mode of negation. By diegeticising the acoustic, especially through the use of synchronous sound, cinema attempts to *contain* and even repress the supplement which it at the same time *requires*.

III.

One of the greatest dangers posed by the hegemony of technology in the western world—in which cinema and various other representational technologies play a central role—is that its very omnipresence threatens to conceal the violence of its effects. One way to attempt to break out of this myopia of familiarity is through an investigation of the difference posed by a non-western culture such as the orient. This could be seen as the context for Martin Heidegger's conversation with Professor Tezuka, during the course of which the Japanese academic suggests Kurosawa's *Rashomon* as an example of the all-consuming 'Europeanization' under discussion. When asked whether he is familiar with the film Heidegger responds enthusiastically that although he had only seen it once, he had been struck by the unusual gestural economy with its emphasis on stasis. Indeed, Heidegger continues, he had felt that *Rashomon* seemed to convey something of the 'otherness' of oriental culture: why then was it being proposed as an *occidental* manifestation? Tezuka explains that while the film *does* reveal aspects of a Japanese 'difference' on the level of content, the very structure of cinematic inscription, the very technology of film is itself already thoroughly European. The very experience of the

⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, 'A Dialogue on Language', in *On the Way to Language*, (trans Peter D Hertz), San Francisco, Harper and Row 1971, p 17.

The Japanese world is from the outset captured and imprisoned in the objectness of photography and is in fact especially framed for photography.

If I have listened rightly you wish to say that the Eastasian world and the technical-aesthetic product of the film industry are incompatible.

This is what I mean. Regardless of what the aesthetic quality of a Japanese film may turn out to be, the mere fact that our world is set forth in the frame of a film forces that world into the sphere of what you call objectness. The cinematic objectification is already a consequence of the ever wider outreach of Europeanization.⁴⁶

While this is only a cursory indication of the direction of Heidegger's analysis of the objectification structure of representation (*Vorstellung*)⁴⁷, the above exchange already contains the central insight of the so-called 'apparatus critique' developed by Jean-Louis Baudry more than fifteen years later: irrespective of the particular content of the image, the photograph is a representation already interpreted, selected and ideologically 'framed' by its very technology.

While a number of contemporary film theorists have correctly pointed out that because of its three-dimensionality 'sound is not "framed" in the same way as the image,'⁴⁸ (my emphasis) this does not preclude that sound is still 'framed' in some way. Indeed, if it is recognised that the image is not an ideologically innocent trace, then the claim that sound is *not* image-like can be read as an attempt to exempt it from critical ideological scrutiny. Conversely, the attempt to think the character of sound as fundamentally *photographic* may reveal ideological effects of the basic acoustic apparatus similar to those Heidegger and Baudry exposed in the technology of the image. In fact, in an important sense the 'framing' of sound is remarkably analogous to that of the image since, with only few exceptions, sound in the cinema is *optical*. As Maurice Jaubert noted as early as 1936

it is well known that the sound track receives its impressions from the vibrations of light caused by the vibrating diaphragm of the microphone, itself set in motion by the sound vibrations of the orchestra. Indeed, one can say that recording consists in the photography of sound. The director with this photograph at his command is in a position to treat sounds just as he treats images.⁴⁹

Despite technological advances which have led to the use of magnetic tape in sound recording, due to the prohibitive conversion costs the *play-back* of recorded sound in cinema remains to a great extent optical, that is, photographically encoded in terms of either variable density or variable area and read off the film by a lamp.⁵⁰ Considered in this way, sound is clearly subject to all the problems of transformation which beset the image.

The applicability of the apparatus critique of the camera to the sound-

⁴⁷ See esp Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology*, (trans. William Lovitt), San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1977, pp 115-154, esp p 128ff. For a detailed treatment of the translation of *Vorstellen* by 'representation' in the above essay, see Jacques Derrida's 'Sending: On Representation', in *Social Research*, vol 49 no 2, Summer 1982, pp 294-326.

⁴⁸ Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', in *Yale French Studies* no 60, 'Cinema/Sound', 1980, p 39.

⁴⁹ Maurice Jaubert, 'Music on the Screen', (1936) cited by Claudia Gorbman, 'Vigol/Jaubert' *Cine-Tracts* vol 1 no 2, Summer 1977, p 77.

⁵⁰ Rick Altman, 'Introduction', *Yale French Studies*, no 60, 'Cinema/Sound', 1980, p 8ff.

⁵¹ Alan Williams, 'Is Sound Recording Like A Language?' in *Yale French Studies* no 60, 'Cinema/Sound', 1980, pp 51-66.

⁵² *ibid*, pp 64-65; this analytical focus is also reflected in the excellent work of Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', *op cit* and Rick Altman, 'Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism', *op cit*.

⁵³ Theodor Adorno, 'A Social Critique of Radio Music', *Kenyon Review* vol VII no 2, 1945, p 210.

⁵⁴ Alan Williams, *op cit*, p 53.

⁵⁵ Using a state-of-the-art tape recorder, for example, magnetic tape is able to capture 70db (with a DBX unit up to 90-100 db) of the 120 db dynamic range of the human ear. However in the translation onto the optical track there are dramatic losses: a new print has a theoretical dynamic range of 50 db (maximum) and in practice closer to 35 db and

track has been increasingly reflected in the critical literature on cinema sound. Alan Williams, for example, investigates the construction of the 'listening subject' using terms adopted from Baudry.⁵¹ Yet, as indicated by Williams' conclusion that 'what is most necessary for a critical, historical account of sound practices in film will be detailed analyses of different strategies of sound use,'⁵² such studies almost always focus on the *techniques* of sound production—editing, dubbing, voice-over, etc, in short, the *employment* of the apparatus—and accord little or no attention to a systematic examination of the *technology of sound itself*.

Adorno, confronted upon his arrival in the USA with the technological reproduction and transmission of European culture, and employed at the Princeton Radio Research Project, made the investigation of the effects of the acoustic apparatus one of his principal concerns. Suspicious of the supposedly 'innocent' technology from the start, Adorno wanted to establish whether 'a symphony played on the air remains a symphony? Are the changes it undergoes by wireless transmission merely slight and negligible modifications or do these changes effect the very essence of the music?'⁵³ This is no small issue: mediation is here unavoidably linked to essential transformation. If familiarity has dulled the capacity to recognise the violence done to sound by recording, Adorno argues that it is important to try to establish carefully the material alterations which do occur and the specific effects of signification they entail.

Because the recording process can only capture sound waves from *one point* (the site of the microphone) in the space which constitutes that sound, recording is inherently *perspectival*. The limitations of such acoustic perspectivism can never be fully reduced or eliminated even through multiple miking, digital delay systems and many speakers. The sampling of the sound just like that of the image (frames per second) may be increased above a certain perceptual threshold but will always remain a more or less differentiated sample or selection, and thus a reading, an interpretation and never the 'original' sound.⁵⁴

Playback is as equally problematic as recording: although 'advanced' technology is rapidly eliminating the remaining 'flaws' in acoustic transmission, the cinema soundtrack lags far behind the vanguard of high fidelity.⁵⁵ Background noise arises on the tape (hiss), in the amplifier (thermal noise) and on the optical track (dust, scratches) creating a constant very low level but still audible 'current' of noise which Adorno refers to as the hear-strip (*Hörstreifen*)⁵⁶: 'the distortion level gives film music, much like radio, the quality of a strip: it seems, like the images, to be marched past the viewer on the screen, much more a copy of music than the music itself.'⁵⁷ Jean-Louis Comolli is right to insist that such technological phenomena be situated historically since, as he points out, they are 'in truth of little weight at a time when it is the whole of sound reproduction, records, radios, which is affected by background noise and interference'.⁵⁸ However, while this may account for the fact that such 'noise' was not actively perceived, the 'hear-strip' is no less (and perhaps more) symptomatic because of its omnipresence. In fact, despite technological development, a certain amount of low-level noise *remains* an ele-

ment in contemporary recording: this is evidenced by the practice of *recording silence* in order to add the hiss which would be notably absent were a piece of 'blank' tape spliced in instead.⁵⁹

The psychological effect of the 'hear-strip' is, according to Adorno, 'somewhat similar to the awareness of the screen in the movies: music appearing upon such a hear-strip may bear a certain image-like character of its own.'⁶⁰ Elsewhere Adorno writes that 'the effect was like acoustic celluloid on which the music had been printed. In sensuous terms this suggested that one was perceiving not the music itself but its *photograph*...'⁶¹ The consequences of such 'musical photography' are not insignificant: when music is conveyed by the acoustic apparatus it is 'photographed in degenerated colors and modified proportions'.⁶² While Adorno recognises that mechanical recording also fosters an analytic attitude towards music (the possibility of repeated close listening, etc)⁶³, he is much more concerned with the ways in which the apparatus *transforms* or re-structures its material. In recorded music, he argues, there is a loss of tone colour and intensity, a reduction of the overtone series, a compression of the dynamic range, an overemphasis on melody, a de-emphasis on accompaniment, an exaggeration of contrasts, etc, all of which combine to impose an 'image character' on the sound.⁶⁴

That Adorno's analysis is *not* simply a nostalgic 'fall' story but rather a narrative of transformation is evidenced in his insistence that changes are effected by *both* the process of recording and the subsequent combination of sound with the image.⁶⁵ Far from mourning a loss with respect to 'live' music, Adorno's project is to understand the specificity of the acoustic mediation in a variety of different contexts. Because film music is heard in relation to the image, its 'distracted' mode of reception affects the manner of its composition. Film music cannot have structural depth but must be primarily surface, effect, colour: 'the more it provides the image with the dimension of depth which it lacks, the less it may develop its own depth.'⁶⁶ Thus film music is affected not only by the technology of reproduction but also by the function it serves in relation to the image. The overall result, which is referred to as 'neutralization' gives film music the character of a *digest* whose material has been *predigested by the technology*.⁶⁷ The homogenisation of the sound is such that even a conservative listener, Adorno claims, is able to listen to music on records or in the cinema which s/he would never stand for in a concert hall. In a formulation very reminiscent of Heidegger's insight regarding the objectification caused by the very technology of photography, Adorno/Eisler conclude that '*as a result of the neutralization the musical style, in the normal sense of the specificity of the materials employed, becomes to a large extent inconsequential*'.⁶⁸

For an analysis of the soundtrack in cinema, Adorno insists, it is not enough to consider a variety of sound *practices* because no matter how radical and innovative they may be they are ultimately put in an apparatus which spits them out again in a digested, blunted and conventionalised form. In classically Brechtian fashion, Adorno/Eisler hold that an investigation of sound 'cannot be separated from the technique of the

a used print only
15-20 db! cf
Bailblé, 'Le Son:
Programmation de
l'écoute', in
Cahiers du Cinéma
no 297, Feb 1979,
p 53.

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⁵⁶ Although in 'The Radio Symphony' op cit, p 110 which was written in English Adorno refers to the 'hear-stripe', the acoustic analogy to the celluloid strip seems best conveyed by 'hear-strip'. The confusion caused by the former is evident in Ben Brewster's 'The Fundamental Reproach (Brecht)', *Cine-Tracts*, vol 1 no 2, Summer 1977, p 45, where the author flags the 'hear-stripe' in a footnote and wonders whether the term refers to 'the range of audible frequencies - or does Brecht mean the sound strip?' It is hopefully clear from the above discussion that neither conjecture is correct.

⁵⁷ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, op cit, p 84 (English p 86).

⁵⁸ Jean-Louis Comolli, op cit, p 133.

⁵⁹ cf Baillblé, op cit, April 1979, p 22 and Theodor Adorno, *Der Getreue Korrepetitor*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976, p 371. In his analysis of 'The Radio Symphony' op cit, p 110 Adorno writes, that the hear-strip 'may not attract any attention and it may not even enter the listener's consciousness, but as an objective characteristic of the phenomenon it plays a part in the apperception of the whole.'

⁶⁰ Theodor Adorno, 'The Radio Symphony', op cit.

⁶¹ Theodor Adorno, *Der Getreue Korrepetitor*, op cit, p 370.

⁶² Theodor Adorno, 'The Radio Symphony', op cit, p 132.

⁶³ Theodor Adorno, *Der Getreue Korrepetitor*, op cit, p 390.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p 370.

recording procedures: if the latter is thoroughly transformed the meaning of the music must consequently be transformed as well'.⁶⁹ It is not sufficient merely to interrogate the uses of sound: the imperative is 'to smash the mechanism of neutralization itself'.⁷⁰ To change the apparatus it must be rethought: the first step is critical analysis.

— According to Benjamin 'the sound film did not change anything fundamental. What remains decisive is that the acting is done for an apparatus, or, in the case of the sound film, for two of them.'⁷¹ In his analysis of the profound changes that take place in the shift from the theatrical to the cinematic what is significant for Benjamin is the advent of reproductive technology, of which sound is just one more manifestation. Yet, whereas the first apparatus, that of the image, has been subjected to sustained ideological scrutiny, the 'second' apparatus, that of the soundtrack, has not. While almost exclusively limited to analyses of music, Adorno/Eisler's work on the technology of the acoustic is seminal for its detailed attention to the specific effects of that second apparatus, to 'the material and the technicalities of transmission'.⁷² The critique of the acoustic apparatus which they pursued is long overdue.

⁶⁵ This is much more evident in Adorno's post-'Culture-Industry' work on cinema; see especially his 'Transparencies on Film', trans. Thomas Y Levin, *New German Critique*, no 24-25, Fall/Winter 1981-82, pp 199-205 and also the excellent introduction by Miriam B Hansen in *ibid*, pp 186-198.

⁶⁶ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, op cit, p 143 (English pp 132-133).

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p 130 (English p 119).

⁶⁸ *ibid*, p 84 (English p 87).

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p 130 (English p 119).

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p 84 (English p 87).

⁷¹ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, op cit, Bd I 2, p 489.

⁷² Theodor Adorno, 'The Radio Symphony', op cit, p 110.

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22nd-27th July

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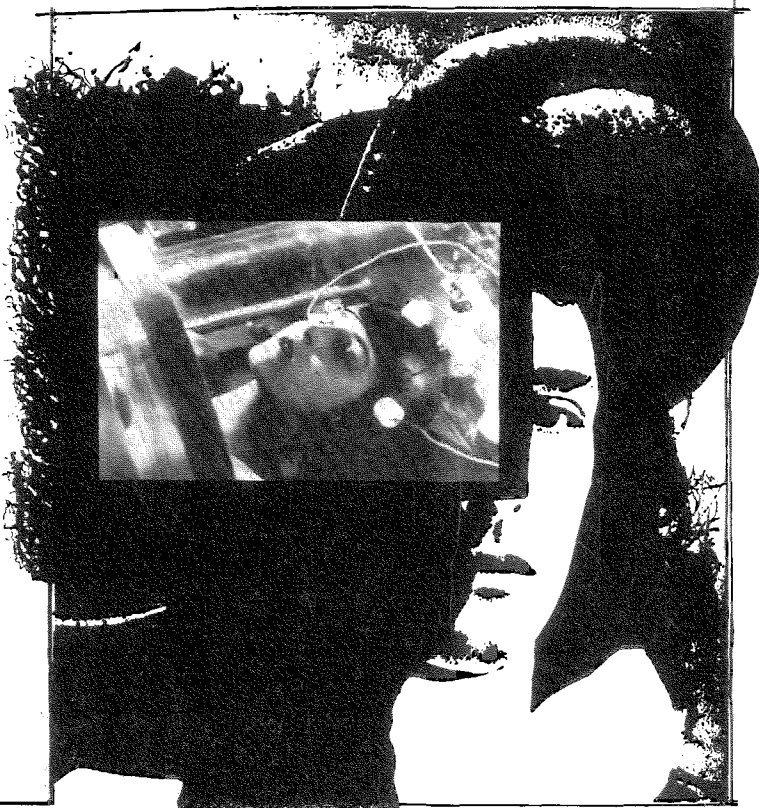
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CARNAL STEREOPHONY

A READING OF 'DIVA'

BY ROBERT LANG

¹ Directed by Jean-Jacques Beineix, France, 1981.

FILMS 'ABOUT' SOUND are relatively new (*The Conversation*, *Blow-Out*) but *Diva*¹ is one of the most self-consciously psychoanalytic narrative feature films about sound (more specifically, the human voice) that has been made to date. Curiously enough, the use of sound in *Diva* is not especially complex or interesting, but in it an obsession with a human voice becomes the sign of the ineffably chic, the style pursued by the film's characters. In a world (the world of *Diva*) dominated by an obsession with style, with the look of things, a recording – the only one – of Cynthia Hawkins' voice provides the necessary aura that this age of mechanical reproduction (particularly of the image) has done so much to diminish.

Diva is a lavishly spectacular film that audaciously alludes to several genres and to shots and scenes from specific films, and invokes all sorts of historiographic flotsam from our film past – a *Phantom of the Paradise* of the 1980s. Somewhere in the dizzying cascade of allusion (and allusion to the allusion) the film has an idea. It is an idea primal in its simplicity, which almost does not survive the melodramatic machinations of the *noir/spy/thriller/fairy tale* movie-as-opera. Cynthia Hawkins, a famous opera star, has never 'heard' herself sing, for she will not permit any recordings of her voice, believing only in the live performance. 'I will not sing alone,' she says. 'I need an audience. Music: it comes and goes. Don't try to keep it.' The recording is 'like robbery and rape', she tells reporters (even as she consents to having her photograph taken). By the end of the film, in a kind of aural mirror phase, she experiences the end of the 'innocent pleasure' she took in her own voice, and shares (the recording of her finest concert) with Jules. She is thereby launched on a trajectory that corresponds in psychoanalysis to the child's transition from auto-eroticism to narcissistic identification with an other.

It is pertinent to ask why we have to talk about a kind of 'aural equivalent' of the mirror phase. Is there, one asks, an aural self for Lacan? Why is it a visual moment of identification that is so crucial in the formation of the subject? What makes *Diva* so interesting psychoanalytically is that the protagonists, Cynthia Hawkins and Jules, attempt to operate at a pre-

Symbolic level. This level should not, strictly, be called the Imaginary in their case because neither of them is inscribed dominantly in a scopic regime (unlike Beineix, the film-maker). She uses her voice (its sound – not words/language) which is all that the new-born pre-Symbolic child has to make known its pleasure or unpleasure. And to some extent Jules' obsession with Hawkins' voice is a manifestation of a desire to return to the pre-Symbolic stage when, for the child, the mother is the source of all satisfaction, of which the sound of the mother's voice can constitute a large part.

Lacan emphasises the 'total distinction between the scopic register and the invocatory, vocatory, vocational field', describing the invocatory drive as 'the closest to the experience of the unconscious'.² While the unconscious is structured like a language, 'the signifiers in this overall structure or order organize the elementary relations of the human being before any formation of the subject'.³ What we see in *Diva* is the subjects' recognition of themselves within these organisations. We see the metaphorical re-enactment of their entry into the Symbolic, or rather their more complete inscription in language. 'In the scopic field', Lacan notes, 'the subject is not essentially indeterminate. The subject is strictly speaking determined by the very separation that determines the break of the *a*, that is to say, the fascinator element introduced by the gaze'.⁴ What *Diva* attempts to do is break the tyranny of the mirror phase. It is not necessarily only the gaze that *holds* the subject, that determines the subject in a fascinator moment, but the voice that can do so also.

The identification of Cynthia Hawkins with Jules (*through* her voice – her own and yet not her own – a recording that *he* has made) spells the end to her illusion of self-sufficiency. Through the recording, Cynthia Hawkins experiences (in the final shot of the film) what looks more like loss than jubilation. The event, for Hawkins, is extremely narcissistic in that she is not assimilating an 'aspect, property or attribute'⁵ of Jules (except to the extent that she identifies herself with Jules as a listener)

² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans Alan Sheridan, ed Jacques-Alain Miller), New York, Norton, 1981, p 104.

³ Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism*, Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p 115.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *op cit*, p 118.

⁵ J Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, (trans Donald Nicholson-Smith), New York, Norton, 1973, p 205.



Cynthia Hawkins – the opera star who never makes a record.

but identifying with her own voice that Jules now holds as his property. It is her own voice that she loves, and the extent of the *outwardness* of her erotic investment is only in that *she loves his love for her*, for her voice.

In the mirror phase the child's first moment of identification, from which develops a sense of self and other (the image), produces a moment of jubilation and loss – jubilation because the child imagines the mirror image to be 'better' than he is (it seems freer, bigger, more coherent), and loss, because the child senses his own 'otherness' in the world. The child moves from autoeroticism to narcissism (when he sees everything as a reflection of himself) until later, the threat of castration launches him on a lifelong search for the security of an image he can never again possess. That original image was of the self, and the self becomes the object of desire. But the self can only be seen in reflections.

This specular analogy of the aural scenario which I have suggested provides the psychoanalytic underpinnings of *Diva* is not exact in its correspondences. First of all, Cynthia Hawkins cannot as a woman experience the threat of castration as such, unless it is from her exclusive possession of her voice that she feels she derives *phallic* power, in which case the threat of an illegal recording can be read as a threat of castration. And why is Jules necessarily a part of the picture? Because his recording equipment, phallic in its capability, restores to Cynthia Hawkins the lost object (her best concert, and the sense of self-sufficiency she had prior to her knowledge of any recording). But Jules (*his physical presence there*) is really extraneous to the scene, both for himself and for her. Indeed, earlier in the film she tells Jules that if he did not exist there would be no need to invent him, for he knows the music so well, he *is* the opera. The clear logic in Hawkins' unclear representation of the matter is that she does not need Jules – he does not do anything that the operatic institution doesn't already do for her: give her a reason to sing, to hear her own voice, indeed give her an identity. She says this, of course, *before* she learns of the recording, with its implication that she need never sing again, once the technologically produced simulacrum has been made. Now he has the power to withhold or offer the gift, the withholding being also a castration, and the offering, a phallic restoration. As for Jules himself, his identification with Hawkins, unlike hers of herself with him, is one of the effects of the Oedipus complex: it is the replacement of abandoned cathexes of parents, not a moment of narcissistic object-choice.

Cynthia Hawkins' singing voice will not last forever (she is 32 and as her manager reminds her, performing twice a month exhausts her) but until the moment she hears her (recorded) voice she is committed to a libidinal economy that does not admit of 'others'. She believes that the live performance is the only real sharing, but of course while the audience represents the field of the Other, it cannot be the actual other. Cynthia Hawkins' performance is an egocentric discourse. She does not speak to a particular person, she just speaks. To use Lacan's punning expression, she speaks '*à la cantonade*'. This egocentric discourse is a case of *hail to the good listener!*'⁶ As a black woman (in the otherwise white world of the film) Cynthia Hawkins is marked as 'other', while for her, Jules is

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *op cit*, p 208.



The black woman singer and the white male fan – two 'others'.

'other'. He does not sing, he is white, he is French (she is American), he is male (and so on) but he has the power/means to consolidate an identity for her through his recording equipment (not to mention the specific recording of the performance she gave the night he stole that delegate-object, her gown) and by his adoration of her voice. Jules himself had believed that the recording was merely for his own pleasure. But as Gorodish points out to him, 'There are no innocent pleasures.'

Of course there are no innocent pleasures, as any attention to the soundtrack of this pleasurable film will reveal. On the level of the cinematic signifier sound is used deftly if not unusually. The opening shots (as is the final shot) are static, containing no movement within the shot or of the camera, while the impressive chords of the overture of an unidentified opera play on the soundtrack. The sound seems to be non-diegetic in the conventional manner of the Hollywood inauguration of a narrative, but it comes abruptly to a stop when Jules, in the first moving image (following the shots of the Paris Opera House) parks his motorcycle, takes off his helmet and begins to walk into the opera house. The implication now is that those sounds were internal diegetic – in Jules' mind in eager anticipation of the performance he is about to attend. Inside the opera house we hear the diegetic rustling sounds of 'presence' and expectation as the camera cranes down past a seated audience. Loud applause accompanies Cynthia Hawkins' stage entrance which we see in the reflection of Jules' sunglasses. With the start of the orchestra we are given a close-up of the tape recorder concealed in Jules' lap. We understand immediately that what he is doing is illicit and probably illegal.⁷ The camera moves past Jules to two men in dark glasses sitting behind him. After the applause that follows Cynthia Hawkins' performance we hear the first distinct line of dialogue: 'What a shame she never makes a record.' Thus the film's essential narrative threads are introduced.

While most of the sound in *Diva* is diegetic (although, obviously, post-recorded and carefully mixed) there is occasionally non-diegetic music.

⁷ Signs which in conjunction with other signs produce a series of connotations of the illicit/illegal: dark glasses worn indoors; the focal point of an event seen in a reflection; this young man singled out in the audience for close-ups; the reference to masturbation in the lap-held equipment that he is surreptitiously operating; the Oriental twin-like men, also in dark glasses, sitting behind him and singled out also by the camera.

This music, though, can sometimes be read as playing in a character's head (the precedent having appeared to establish itself in the opening shots) for Jules and all his friends, we soon see, are very much children of the consumer age and are expertly discriminating when it comes to matters of taste in the decoration of their living spaces and the ways in which they spend their leisure time. And good music is one of their major preoccupations, playing either in their minds or on expensive equipment at home.

Non-diegetic rock music with thriller-movie music overtones accompanies the street scene in which we first see the desperate, marked prostitute Nadia, and yet there is an extraordinary attention paid to the sounds of specific actions and objects in the diegesis, such as the pulley mechanism of the elevator in Jules' building, the whipping sound of the flying ice-pick that kills Nadia, and the clicking of Alba's heels on the tile floor as she leaves the record shop from which she has just stolen an album. In the gothic gloom of the loft where Gorodish and Alba live they play ethereal, 'liquid' music that often sounds like whale 'songs', as Alba whooshes around on her roller-skates. A considerable tension is generated by the violent crunch and crash of the destruction of the Renault that Jean Saporta's spies used when they killed Nadia, followed by the insistent chime from a bell tower (for whom does this bell toll?) during Saporta's efforts to discover the exact circumstances of Nadia's death. Saporta, the Chief Inspector of Homicide, learns that Nadia has made a tape, and in due course we learn that this tape (which she slips into Jules' mailbag seconds before her death) exposes Saporta as the head of the largest prostitution ring in Paris.

The care in the isolation and presentation of sounds in *Diva* is a filmic contribution/equivalent to the accumulation of crisply represented details in the traditional detective novel and film. The chirping parakeet of the old-age pensioner to whom Jules delivers a cheque, Alba's crackling cellophane dress, the squeak of the Wheel of Fortune at the fair, and the



Plugged in –
Saporta's hit man,
Cure.

ritual surrounding every replay of Cynthia Hawkins' performance are not clues as such, but they have a way of sharpening the viewer's responses and charging the film with energy. 'Ooh! Out of sight! What a voice!' Alba says when Jules plays the tape to her. Indeed it is an experience which (unusual for the cinema) has little to do with sight. The film's central experience on the story level is an aural one. Even the film's slimiest character, Cure (one of Saporta's hit men), is 'plugged in', and the tinny sound of music issuing from the earphone dislodged from his bleeding ear (seen in close-up) signals his death and represents literally (and metaphorically) an important break in the electronic (sound) circuit that connects him with Saporta and the Ring.

Sounds are also represented as healing and comforting – not just as signs of all that makes this diegesis move with such velocity. After Jules has been shot Gorodish and Alba take him (in a white Citroën – 'a model once favoured by the police and gangsters') to an 'enchanted castle' – a splendid lighthouse far from the violence and intrigue of Paris. There they listen to the crackle of the fire in the hearth and the rhythmic thudding of the waves on the rocks. Lyrical non-diegetic harp-like notes segue from a shot of Gorodish leaving the lighthouse to a shot of Alba inside the lighthouse preparing a breakfast for Jules – these with the cries of gulls somewhere outside. Gorodish has gone to meet Saporta in a huge, deserted train station. It is a scene which even by the film's own standard of reality is exquisitely unreal, soaring into a realm of such improbability as to border on the diegetically hallucinatory. Through imitation and exaggeration the Thatcher Library scene from *Citizen Kane* is evoked. Not least in their contribution to the eerie beauty of the scene are the moog synthesiser sounds on the soundtrack. Saporta steps into a shaft of light and a tape descends slowly on a wire while Gorodish dictates his instructions and terms to Saporta from his place high near the roof. Gorodish controls the whole event with an unspecific but obviously sophisticated technology. Even his voice is reproduced with an impossibly all-enveloping resonance.

The 'signature' to Nadia's tape is, curiously enough, a photograph of herself and Saporta in each other's arms. Saporta burns it. (But was not it, like the tape, also infinitely reproducible, and therefore no signature at all – the concept of authenticity having been mysteriously destroyed by the fact of a mechanically reproducible 'original' tape and photograph?) At any rate, the tape by itself is (perhaps) not enough (to *prove* anything, to convict Saporta) nor is the photograph.⁸ But together – sound and image – they furnish an acceptable level of certainty, just as this film deprived of its soundtrack, or the soundtrack without the images, would produce unacceptably ambiguous or opaque significations, and yet together can produce the most unambiguous signs that are possible in any system of representation.

While *Diva* might be 'about' the phallic power of the sound of Mother's voice or about recorded sound as a two-edged sword, sound is used, as has been noted, in a fairly conventional manner. The recorded voice offers salvation even as it destroys (Nadia's tape restores justice,

⁸ It must be remembered that a new tape of Nadia's confession is forged to clear Saporta. While the authenticity of the tape remains (it will be believed) we know it to be false. All recordings possess this ability to be false.

⁹ Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, (trans Richard Seaver), New York, Grove Press, 1961, p 65.

¹⁰ I have somewhat conflated in these paragraphs two similar but different notions of desire, represented by Jean-Louis Baudry (in 'The Apparatus', *Camera Obscura*, no 1, 1976) and Jacques Derrida (in 'Signature, Event, Context', *Glyph 1*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). Joan Copjec points out in her article, 'India Song /Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta desert: The Compulsion to Repeat', (*October* 17, Summer 1981) the important difference between Baudry's notion of desire as a matter of sufficiency and Derrida's notion of desire as a matter of insufficiency. For Derrida desire has *never* been satisfied, while Baudry sees desire as 'a nostalgia for a state in which desire has been satisfied through the transfer of a perception to a formation resembling hallucination which seems to be activated by the cinematic apparatus'. The cinema (the

although it kills her; and Cynthia Hawkins' tape saves her from/destroys an impossible innocence). In the last shots of Cynthia Hawkins listening to her recorded voice the auditorium, having undergone a material renovation, is nevertheless empty. The possibility of being completely 'at one' with an audience as a pre-mirror phase child is 'at one' with the world, has been forever lost. From here on Cynthia Hawkins might attain an almost-at-one relation to her audiences but will never again truly experience what Riva in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is attempting to articulate when she says:

*Little by little he grew cold beneath me. Oh! How long it took him to die. When? I'm not quite sure. I was lying on top of him . . . yes . . . the moment of death actually escaped me, because . . . because even at that very moment, and even afterward, yes, even afterward, I can say that I couldn't feel the slightest difference between this dead body and mine. All I could find between this body and mine were obvious similarities, do you understand? (Shouting.) He was my first love. . . .*⁹

It is that time when there was no difference between perception and representation. And it is this desire that is at the heart of the appeal of the cinema. When Jules' garage home is wrecked (we hear it but do not see it – until later) he goes immediately to his friends' apartment. 'Why don't they make a mattress for three?' complains the girl as Jules, still wearing his motorcycle helmet, crawls into the bed with her. Sometimes they do. The cinema is a mattress for three. In shot counter-shot syntagma it is I (subject) that connects A and B. I am between them. And I am there too with Jules and the girl. It is a return to the pre-mirror stage where there is no perceived difference between one's body and the rest of the world that Jules craves and which is part of what draws us to the cinema.

Desire corresponds to what Derrida calls *restance* – the measure of the inadequation of body and psyche, related as they are through the radical insufficiency of the former.¹⁰ It is this gap – between body and psyche – that the cinema (at least the 'kind of cinema to which *Diva* belongs) attempts to close. It is an impossible desire, but in the singing human voice, because it is the *body*, because it bears traces of what Roland Barthes calls *signifiante*, escaping the 'tyranny of meaning'¹¹ one can approach it.

When Jules visits Cynthia Hawkins in her hotel suite she runs a bath for him. It is poetically logical, this amniotic bath that precedes her singing for him. It is the *mise-en-scène* (nativity scene) of Jules' desiring pattern. The scene is brief and slight: the bath she prepares for him; Jules afterwards, naked under the towel; her singing to him – and then it is interrupted (by a third term – the men who want her recording) for there are no 'innocent pleasures', even between 'mother' and 'son'.

What is perverse about the concluding shot of the film (and makes Jules' physical contact with Hawkins all wrong psychoanalytically speaking) is that he is an *aural* voyeur, as it were. A distance must be maintained between him and her if his illusion/identification is to be preserved. No physical confrontation or contact is necessary. But films have

to end somehow. So idiopathic is her identification and so extreme is his invocatory drive that the film necessarily disappoints a strong socioculturally and generically produced desire to see love stories (the love element in films) end on a kiss (the oral and the scopic levels together, culminating). So they join hands, in the 'presence' of the voice. As Lacan has mentioned, the invocatory drive has 'the privilege of not being able to close'.¹² And so how does a narrative about the invocatory drive end? Nicely enough, the last shot of the film is held in a freeze-frame, and the image track of *Diva* ends (gives way to black leader) noticeably *before* the sound track.

Music is a stolen, illicit pleasure in *Diva*, and conventional sex has disastrous consequences: Jules' garage is smashed up while he is with one of the Avenue Foch prostitutes; Nadia, who has made a profession of sex, is killed; whereas music magnifies and appeases desire, and is stolen from record shops, illegally recorded and shared with friends like precious foodstuffs in wartime. Gorodish is soaking in a bathtub in the placental gloom of his loft when he first hears the recording of Cynthia Hawkins singing Catalani's *La Wally*. And with a cigarette, he has every prop for the experience of perfect pleasure, if not of bliss.

Diva is not the perfect movie, however, failing as it does to establish a centre, a controlling principle, falling instead somewhere between a desire to seduce with plot, visual pleasure, allusion, and the sound of the human voice when it sings. But perhaps it is only in such moments (Gorodish in his bathtub) that one can experience 'a whole carnal stereo-phony'.¹³ It is the kind of moment that *Diva* as a *film* makes possible.

mattress for three) and Riva's experience (and memory) of her lover's death as she lay on top of him, and Jules' climbing into the bed with the girl, and Cynthia Hawkins listening to her actual and recorded voice, then, to use Copjec's words, are themselves each 'a psychic supplement, the indication within the subject of its unfulfilment'.

¹¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', *Image-Music-Text* (trans Stephen Heath) New York, Hill and Wang, 1977.

¹² Jacques Lacan, op cit, p 200.

¹³ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (trans Richard Miller) New York, Hill and Wang, 1974, p 66.

MOOD MUSIC

AN INQUIRY INTO NARRATIVE FILM MUSIC BY SIMON FRITH

¹ The edited text of a talk given at the SEFT Sound Cinema weekend, Triangle Arts Centre, Birmingham, October 29-30, 1983.

IN THIS ARTICLE¹ I'm more concerned to ask questions than provide answers, and I should stress that my questions come from my interest in how popular music works rather than from film theory as such.

I'll begin, then, with the Barry Manilow problem. My question is not why is Manilow so successful, but why does his music have such an *emotional* impact when he seems so personally anonymous, so uninteresting in terms of vocal style or arrangement? The first clue to his pop appeal is that he started his career as a commercial jingle writer, but I'm sure that the reason for his impact—even the wariest listeners can feel their 'heart strings pulled'—is that he makes the sort of music that these days comes at the end of a Hollywood film, writes the sort of song that plays as we leave the cinema and rearrange our feelings.

Theme songs (rather than soundtrack excerpts) have been an important source of pop hits since the 1950s ('High Noon' is an obvious example, or Henry Mancini numbers like 'Moon River'—the theme for *Breakfast at Tiffany's*), and this is clearly an aspect of how Hollywood film music is planned. Part of the promotional drama surrounding a new James Bond film, for example, concerns who is going to be chosen to write and sing the theme tune, and, in the 1960s, traditional film scorers like Bernard Herrmann denounced the degeneration of film music into pop song. But if such songs have a straight commercial object—there's extra money to be made from pop (the American charts, in particular, have been dominated by film themes in recent years) and a well-timed theme record release is an extremely effective film trailer—they have a filmic significance too, particularly given their function of closing a film. Theme songs work, first, as *summary*, they reprise a melody we've been hearing all through the film. Second, the songs capture the *mood* of an ending—romantic harmony, new wisdom, social uplift. And third, theme songs often seem to have a built-in sense of sadness or *nostalgia*: the film is over, we have to withdraw from its experience, get 'back to reality'.

What interests me here, though, is not these musical functions as such, but the fact that *songs* are now conventionally used to perform these functions—music, that is, with voices and words, neither of which need

have anything to do with characters or dialogue in the film (usually, indeed, the only obvious link between a film and its song is the shared title and even that is becoming less common). The effect of this is that the song becomes a kind of *commentary* on the film: the singers represent us, the audience, and our response to the film, but also become our teachers, making sure we got the film's emotional message. Theme songs do this by using pop's own emotional conventions and thus place films in a much wider framework of pop romance and pop common sense. The current norm for such songs seems to be the male/female duet, which enables the music both to articulate vocally the male/female basis of Hollywood love and also to stylise emotional intimacy. Recent hit examples are Joe Cocker's and Jennifer Warnes's 'Up Where We Belong' (from *An Officer and a Gentleman*) and James Ingrams's and Patti Austin's 'How Do You Keep The Music Playing?' (from *Best Friends*). Both songs draw on black musical techniques of emotional expression (which have nothing to do with the films in question) and both make generalised references to the future – 'who knows what tomorrow will bring?'/'how do you keep the music playing, how do you make it last?' – which link the mood of the end of the film to the mood of the end of watching the film. (And both songs reveal how useful the synthesiser is in preserving the Hollywood equation of love and the sound of massed strings.)

My conclusion from these examples is that we can't develop an explanation of how music works in films without reference to an explanation of how popular music works more generally. From this perspective, it's surprising how often in film studies it is asserted, in Schönberg's words, that 'music never drags a meaning around with it', that it is non-representational, 'abstract art par excellence' (Eisler), 'useless' (Adorno). Such assertions are the basis of numerous accounts of how a film's 'musical system' supports or counters its 'visual system'. My sense of pop music is that, in fact, it drags all sorts of meanings into and out of films. There's a standard musicological exercise, for example, in which people are played pieces of instrumental music and asked to write down their 'associations'. The results (when I gave this paper in Birmingham, I played pieces of the soundtracks of *The Big Country*, *Psycho*, *A Summer Place* and *American Gigolo*) suggest both that there are widely shared conventions of musical meaning and that these conventions are partly derived from people's shared experiences of film soundtracks.

Claudia Gorbman (who has written the best essay on narrative film music) suggests that we should think in terms of three sorts of musical code:

- a) pure musical codes, generating musical discourse, music referring to music itself;
- b) cultural musical codes, music referring to the usual cultural context of its production and consumption;
- c) cinematic musical codes, music in formal relationship to co-existent elements in a film.²

² Claudia Gorbman: 'Narrative Film Music', *Yale French Studies* 'Cinematic Sound', no 60, 1980, p 185.

³ Quoted in Tony Thomas: *Music for the Movies*, A S Barnes, 1973, New York, pp 96-97

In practice, though, these different 'levels' are hard to separate. Take the distinction between pure and cultural musical codes: the concept of a pure musical code draws on an account of 'classical' music, on the possibility of a formal, structural analysis of rational, tonal music organised by certain compositional regulations. But this is a peculiar form of music, music without words or direct social function, which is, Eisler suggested, specific to bourgeois culture and has to be understood as such. The 'purity' of the music is, in other words, itself a cultural code and, in fact, music in the classical tradition is heard to express the 'soul' of its composer and to convey or invoke particular sorts of imagery. Both these readings of classical music are important for the continuous use the cinema has made of nineteenth century romantic music. One early use of film, for example, was to show the images taken to lie in the accompanying music (just like rock videos now). Miklos Rozsa provides an entertaining account of the possible complexity of the interplay between musical and film images:

*Billy Wilder approached me at a party and said he loved my violin concerto, and that he had worn out his copy of the record and wondered if I had another one. I was as intrigued as much as flattered but all he would say was, 'I've got an idea.' Some months later he called me into his office and revealed the idea: he had written a screenplay called **The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes** and he had written it around my concerto, inspired by the fact that Holmes liked playing the fiddle. The theme of the first movement is somewhat nervous and this apparently suggested to Wilder Holmes's addiction to cocaine. The theme of the second movement of the concerto brought a lady spy to Wilder's mind, and the turbulent third movement conjured up, for him, the Loch Ness monster. He said, 'This is perfect monster music.' I wasn't flattered but he was right, it did work out quite well. I agreed to score the film for him, using the concerto. He seemed to think this would be easy because I wouldn't have to think up any new themes. Actually it was very difficult. The concerto was not written with any images in mind and the timings had to be altered to fit the film sequences. It would have been much easier to invent something fresh.³*

The most interesting current approach to musical 'mood' conventions is being developed in Sweden by the musicologist Philip Tagg. He cites an experiment performed by one of his Gothenburg colleagues in a post-graduate seminar:

A psychologist from Lund read what a patient had said while listening to a particular piece of music under hypnosis (the instructions to the patient had been to say what the music made him/her see, like in a day-dream). The seminar knew neither the identity nor anything else about the piece of music which had given rise to the patient's associations, which were roughly as follows. Alone out in the countryside on a gently sloping field or meadow near some trees at the top of the rise where there was the view of a lake and the forest on the other side. Using this information only, the seminar was asked to make a rough score of the sort of music they thought might have evoked



The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes: inspired by the detective's interest in the violin and the director's in a violin concerto.

such associations. The seminar's sketch consisted of high notes (perhaps flageolets) sustained in the violins and a low pedal point in the cellos and basses. These two pitch polarities were in consonant (either octave or fifth) relation to each other. A rather undecided, quiet but slightly uneasy figure was put into the viola part now and again while a solo woodwind instrument (either flute, oboe or clarinet) played a quasi-modal legato melodic line which wandered slowly and slightly aimlessly piano over the rest of the almost static sounds (*pianissimo*). The seminar's quick sketch proved to correspond on most counts with the original musical stimulus which was the taptoe from Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony*.⁴

Tagg's own research interest is in the 'mood music collections' that are used by companies making film commercials, industrial documentaries, government promotions and a variety of cinema entertainments. The coding of musical moods dates back to the ways in which nineteenth century music was taken to carry meanings, and Tagg suggests that there were material reasons why the cinema took over these 'classical' conventions:

⁴ Philip Tagg: 'Nature' as a Musical Mood Category, International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 1983, Gothenburg, p 31.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷ Tony Thomas, *op cit.*, p. 38.

⁸ Quoted in Tony Thomas, *op cit.*, p. 171.

*there was no technically, economically, socially or culturally viable music for use in the early years of the capitalist film industry other than that provided by the bourgeois musical tradition. There was no other storable music, neither in graphic, mechanical, optical nor electronic form, neither was there any other sort of transculturally viable 'nature music' other than that of the bourgeoisie.*⁵

Tagg's point here is that such 'nature music' is ideologically loaded, the music represents a particular account of 'nature'. Today the mood music catalogues cross reference nature themes and sounds with various emotional labels, such that 'nature is mainly viewed as a positive, pleasant source of relaxation and recreation, as a leisure facility, as a backcloth for romance, as a historical-meditative retreat.'⁶

Similar assumptions lay behind the use of cue sheets in silent film accompaniment, pioneered by Max Winkler, a music publisher's clerk with an exceptional musical memory, whose catalogue 'listed all the compositions under categories—action music, animal music, church music—sinister, chase, sad, mysterious, majestic, furious, etc, etc.'⁷ In this context (especially as Winkler later confessed to 'dismembering the great masters. We murdered the works of Beethoven, Mozart, Grieg, J S Bach...') it is difficult to lay bare 'pure musical codes'. The question becomes how we come to have associations for sounds and structures, how the pure and cultural musical codes relate to each other.

Cultural and cinematic musical codes are similarly entangled, if only because our 'cultural' understanding of musical meanings is, by this stage of cultural history, so dependent on their recurring film contexts. As film composer George Antheil put it in 1945:

*Hollywood music is very nearly a public communication, like radio. If you are a movie fan (and who isn't?) you may sit in a movie theatre three times a week listening to the symphonic background scores which Hollywood composers concoct. What happens? Your musical tastes become molded by these scores, heard without knowing it. You see love, and you hear it. Simultaneously. It makes sense. Music suddenly becomes a language for you, without your knowing it.*⁸

This is to raise a number of historical questions. How, for example, did silent film pianists develop their sense of 'appropriate' accompaniment? How significant were cue sheets? To hear someone play for a silent film today, is to hear someone drawing on the expectations of solo piano (whether Chopin or Russ Conway) and on implicit assumptions about how silent films *should* sound—the piano now is played to connote the piano then. The interplay of music's cultural and cinematic meanings has its own history (and it would be interesting in this context to compare Hollywood's effect on popular music with the development of popular film and music in, for instance, India). In cinema's early history, accompanying music was part of the process in which cinema became 'respectable'; nowadays the absence of music is taken as the sign of a film's seriousness. Music may carry a meaning in film, in short, by

drawing attention to the 'cultural conventions of its cinematic use', by drawing on genre rules which may or may not be confirmed by other aspects of the film.

If popular forms (jazz and country music, rock and roll and disco) first get used in films to signal their 'outside' social source (black culture, Southern culture, youth culture, and so on), their use is often soon so stylised as to refer, rather, to their place in previous films. Early 1970s black action films, for example (*Shaft*, *Superfly*, *Troubleman*, etc), so encoded the wah wah guitar that its use in a film score now (in 1982's *Vortex*, say) inevitably appeals to our ability to draw on *film* references. (Rock has often been taken to be a problematic form for film scorers – its very *presence* can swamp surrounding visual images. Rock videos, though, reveal that rock's musical meanings can soon be closed down by the systematic use of visual clichés.) The most interesting film composers (I'm particularly intrigued by Bernard Herrmann and Ennio Morricone) draw on music's ability to cross and *confuse* cinematic and cultural codes in their construction of sound 'narrative'.⁹

One paradox of film music is that while 'high theorists' have paid much less attention to aural than to visual codes, 'ordinary' film viewers (low theorists?) take the complications of musical reference for granted. At the SEFT Sound weekend discussion of television commercials, for instance, I noted the following casual musical descriptions: 'middle-of-the-road', 'background', 'up-beat', '*Close Encounters* climactic', 'new-exciting-world-just-around-the-corner', 'youth music', 'homely, healthy, folkly'. Everyone present seemed to understand and agree with such descriptions even though they draw on a remarkable jumble of references and assumptions, fuse musical, cultural, historical and cinematic allusions. I want to keep this in mind in addressing the three issues that have most fruitfully occupied more systematic approaches to film music.

Realism

In common sense terms it might seem that music is the 'non-realist' aspect of films, yet audiences take it for granted that strings accompany a clinch. Indeed, a clinch without strings may seem *less* real, though another film convention is to climax a sex scene with silence – as if to register its 'privacy' (and our voyeuristic embarrassment).

The point of this example is to stress that music is as essential to the perceived 'truth' of a film as everything else, but the reality music describes/refers to is a different sort of reality than that described/referred to by visual images. Film composers themselves often take their cue on this from Wagner, who argued that the purpose of music was 'to amplify what can't be shown' – and what can't be shown is regularly called 'atmosphere' or 'mood'. Broadly speaking, two strands of reality seem to be involved here.

First, **emotional reality**. Music, it seems, can convey and clarify the emotional significance of a scene, the true, 'real' feelings of the characters involved in it. Music, in short, signals what's 'underneath' or

⁹ For a fuller discussion of this point see Simon Frith, 'Sound and Vision', *Collusion* 1, 1981, pp 7-9.

¹⁰Quoted in Tony Thomas, *op cit*, p 193.

'behind' a film's observable gestures. Thus for composer Jerry Goldsmith the aim of film music is 'emotional penetration', while in Elmer Bernstein's words:

The job of the composer is really very varied. You must use your art to heighten the emotional aspects of the film – music can tell the story in purely emotional terms and the film by itself cannot. The reason that it can't is that it's a visual language and basically intellectual. You look at an image and you then have to interpret what it means, whereas if you listen to something or someone and you understand what you hear – that's an emotional process. Music is particularly emotional – if you are affected by it, you don't have to ask what it means.¹⁰

Second, **reality of time and place.** Another recurring point made by the film scorers interviewed by Tony Thomas is how much research they do. In writing music for a film set in a particular historical period or in a particular geographical place, they must produce sounds which current audiences believe relate to what people in that time or place would have 'really' heard. This is a more complicated matter than it might seem. The 'reality' of film musical settings actually refers to historical and geographical myths (themselves constructed, in part, by previous musics in previous films set in these places and times). Thus the music for *Zorba the Greek* became so powerfully connotative of 'Greece' that Greek restaurants (even those in Greece itself) have to use the music to convince customers of their 'Greekness'. And a time and a place can have an emotional meaning too (this is one of the functions of 'nature music'). The Australian set *Picnic at Hanging Rock* thus conveyed the 'mystery' of the rock by using Gheorghe Zamfir's Eastern European pan pipes (underscored by a cathedral organ), while Michael



Zorba the Greek: a score which came to connote 'Greekness'.

Nyman's score for *The Draughtsman's Contract* used the appropriate historical musical form but scored instrumentally according to the rules of contemporary minimalism, thus making the apparent celebration of 'order' distinctly unsettling.

All these examples of musical realism raise the question of how audiences *recognise* musical authenticity. It's easy to move (like Elmer Bernstein) from the directness of music's emotional impact to an assertion of its 'natural' meaning, so it's worth citing another cautionary musicological story: a group of African musicians, invited to tour the US folk festival circuit found that their music was getting a decidedly cool response, was being dismissed as 'commercial'. After a few weeks the musicians sat down and worked out a new arrangement of their material, designed specifically to signal 'authenticity' in American folk terms. With this 'fake' sound (it bore little relationship to the music they played in their home country) they became widely praised for their 'ethnic' flair.

Diegesis

The most systematic theoretical approach to film music begins by distinguishing its diegetic use (when it has a place in 'the narratively implied spatio-temporal world of the actions and characters', played by the band in a night club scene, for example) and its non-diegetic use (when the music heard has no source within the film's own world). The important point here, as Claudia Gorbman has made clear, is that in practice music straddles this apparently clean divide. How, for example, do we classify the moment when someone remembers a tune and we hear it on the soundtrack? The physical production of the music is non-diegetic, but its emotional production is diegetic. Is the character 'really hearing something'?

More generally, it seems that our classification of music in terms of diegesis depends on an implicit sense of sounds' *appropriateness* to a scene, in terms, that is, of musical realism (which, as I've already suggested, is not the same thing as visual realism). If, for example, the diegetic/non-diegetic distinction refers to the source of a sound, then this is not just a question of what we can actually see in a scene but of what we might *expect to see* as part of the film's realistic 'soundscape'. In *The Godfather*, for example, Nino Rota's score uses and makes deliberate reference to Italian street music, to 'live' sounds, even when the musicians couldn't possibly be present in the narrative. This is a non-diegetic use of music, but one which is drawing our attention to the music's previous 'real' presence. In youth films, from *American Graffiti* to *The Big Chill*, to give a different sort of example, rock'n'roll is so much part of the 'diegesis' (and we do indeed see radios and record players turned on, even discs being played by Wolfman Jack himself) that it is misleading to assert that in those scenes when such music has no 'real' source that it suddenly becomes non-diegetic. Disco music is used



similarly in *Saturday Night Fever*: in the love scene 'How Deep Is Your Love' is the sort of song that *could* have been on the radio or record player—the implication is that the film characters are 'hearing' it as clearly as we are in the audience. By the time we get to a film like *Bladerunner* we find that the 'reality' of this future Los Angeles is guaranteed precisely by the invisibility of the ever-present synthesised sounds—outside the cinema too we are increasingly surrounded by music which has no apparent source.

Subjectivity

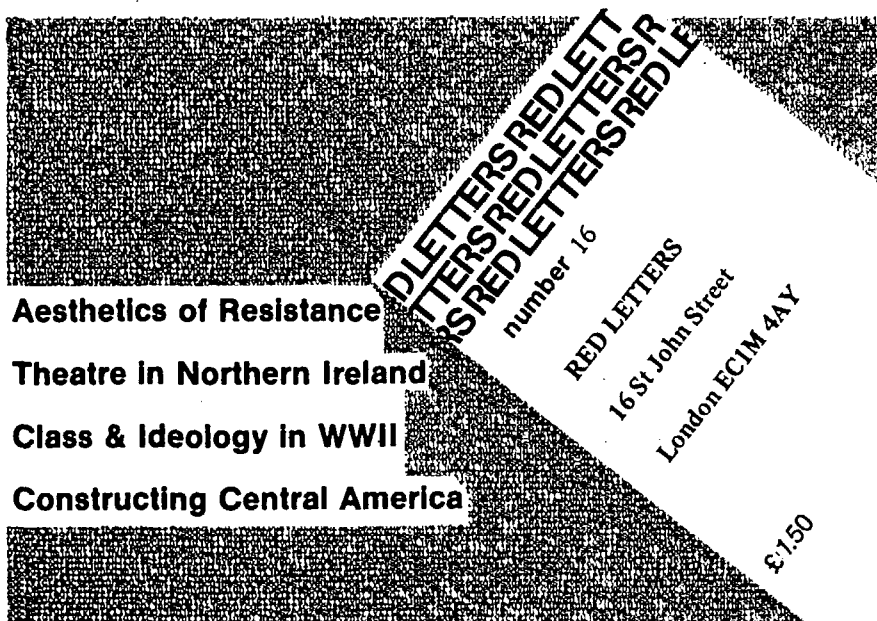
The third important question raised by theoretical debate is how music works to position a film's spectators (or auditors), and this is to address the question of emotional realism from a slightly different perspective: one function of film music is to reveal our emotions as the *audience*. Film music is often said to have physical effects—sending shivers down the spine, bringing a lump to the throat, and sounds, more obviously than visions, have collective effects—we hear a beat and tap our feet (or march or work) together. Film scores are thus important in representing *community* (via martial or nationalistic music, for example) in both film and audience. The important point here is that as spectators we are drawn to identify not with the film characters themselves but with their emotions, which are signalled pre-eminently by music which can offer us emotional experience *directly*. Music is central to the way in which the pleasure of cinema is simultaneously individualised and shared.

There is, in this context, another sort of approach to musical meaning—the Barthesian analysis of music as a *sensuous* pleasure, in which we are

overwhelmed by sound (as in *Bladerunner*?). Barthes himself raised the question of why certain sorts of voice give pleasure (speaking as well as singing voices), why we take delight in the experience of meanings *being made*.¹¹ This is to widen the question of film music in two directions: first, by linking it to non-musical but human sounds; second, by referring us to films, musicals, which are explicitly about music making. In the long run any analysis of music in film will have to cover all this ground, but in this paper I've been specifically concerned with music's coded pleasures and so my closing question is this: where do emotional codes come from? This is to go back to the issue of the clench and strings: to have meaning, emotions must be shaped, and this is as much a public as a private process, one in which music (and music making) seems central. Do people 'hear harmonies' when they kiss outside the cinema as well? To develop the theory of film music we need, in Antoine Hennion's words, 'not so much a sociology of music as a musicology of society'¹².

¹¹Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in Stephen Heath (ed), *Image-Music-Text*, London, Fontana, 1977, pp 179-189.

¹²Antoine Hennion, 'Music as a Social Production', David Horn and Philip Tagg (eds), *Popular Music Perspectives*, International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 1982, Gothenburg and Exeter, p 40.



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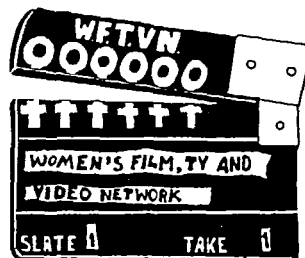
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ROCKER BOY BLUES

MARK HUSTWITT EXAMINES THE WRITING ON POPULAR MUSIC

89

WE LIVE TODAY in a society pervaded by electronic sound, where the music we choose to listen to, or make, is seen as a symbol of our individual personality. We defend our choice of music as strongly (and as complexly) as we do our politics or favourite football team. Yet despite the phenomenon that, as one writer puts it, 'the average Westerner's brain probably spends around twenty-five per cent of its lifetime registering, monitoring and decoding it'¹, popular music has received comparatively little attention from those interested in popular culture. Work on popular music has tended to be grounded in theories and practices devised to cope with other spheres of social life, and then applied to popular music; little writing has emerged which has developed directly to examine popular music as an object of study with characteristics unique or special to itself. This article will examine some of the theories and themes currently used to study popular music, concentrating on those which are concerned with the determination of the meanings of popular music texts.² I'll consider three themes: first, the notion that the commodity form which popular music takes, and the capitalist relations of mass industrial production by which music is created today, in some way determine *in toto* the meanings which those texts produce; secondly, the way in which the use of discourses on 'authenticity' has created problems in both theorising and empirically investigating uses of popular music, and music's place in cultural life; thirdly, the uses which have been made of film theory and semiotics by those seeking to 'decode' popular music. In conclusion, I'll set out a few ideas on how the study of popular music might proceed if it is to be a useful pedagogic exercise

¹ Philip Tagg, 'Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice', *Popular Music* (2), 1982, p 37.

² There is not space to discuss what popular music is: part of this paper's argument is that it must be reformulated as an object of study. See Frans Birrer's excellent summation of current definitions, 'Definitions and Research Orientation: Do We Need a Definition of Popular Music?', Dept. of Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Leiden, Holland.

³ For guides to Adorno's work, see Dick Bradley, *The Cultural Study of Music*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies – Stencilled Paper no 61; Max Paddison, 'The Critique Criticised: Adorno and Popular Music', *Popular Music* (2), 1982, and Richard Middleton, 'Reading' *Popular Music*, Unit 16 of the Open University Popular Culture course (U203), Open University Press.

⁴ See Simon Frith, 'The Pleasures of the Hearth', *Formations of Pleasure*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, pp 101-123; and Dick Hebdige, 'A Cartography of Taste', *Block 4*, 1981, pp 39-56.

⁵ Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*, London, Faber and Faber, 1934, pp 239, 233.

⁶ On 'fetishism' in *Capital* see Nikolas Rose, 'Fetishism and Ideology', *Ideology and Consciousness* (2), 1977, pp 27-54.

rather than simply a reworking of old battles and old theories in new territory.

Determinations

A number of writers on popular music have argued, following Theodor Adorno, that the rise of mass produced musical commodities during the past one hundred years has radically altered the relationship between music and its audience, as well as the creative relationship.

Space does not permit a full exposition of Adorno's work³, so I shall restrict my comments to some brief remarks on his notion of the commodity form. This form, which musical texts have increasingly taken since the turn of the nineteenth century, Adorno proposes to be the determining factor in generating musical meanings. This concern with the commodity-form derives from his reading of Marx's *Capital*, to which Adorno adds the Hegelian rhetoric of the 'young' Marx, ideas drawn from his reading of Freud and his experiences as a musician in the twenties when he studied under Alban Berg, among others. The introduction of mass industrial production, he argues, results in the devaluing of musical aesthetics – the ease with which music can then be procured effects its affect. In this Adorno reflects a feeling common at the time, and not confined to Marxists.⁴ In his book *Music Ho!*, Constant Lambert writes of 'the appalling popularity of music... We live in an age of tonal debauch where the blunting of the finer edge of pleasure leads only to a more hysterical and frenetic attempt to recapture it.' Lambert goes on to call the loudspeaker the street-walker of music, and complains that 'never has there been so much music-making and so little musical experience of a vital order'.⁵ The increasing overproduction and ease of access to music is seen as a detrimental trend. These views are mirrored in Adorno's writings on both serious and popular music. In part they suggest an approach based more on an elitist discourse of aesthetics opposed to massification as a threat to idealist 'standards' than Marxism.

However, Adorno differs from Lambert and others in one important respect; he sees the source of the devaluation of music not simply in the proliferation of media which occurred in the 1920s, but in the form in which these media produced music for consumption – as commodities. Adorno's rendering of this commodity fetishism, however, owes more to Freud than Marx⁶. For Adorno commodities are desired not because of any 'real needs' (his theory of need is never clearly set out), but because they are high-priced and highly-prized objects. They are in demand because of their existence as commodities *qua* objects with an exchange-value. Despite everything else, when consumers purchase a musical commodity they are purchasing its exchange-value rather than its use-value. He writes:

The consumer is really worshipping the money he himself has paid for the

*ticket to the Toscanini concert. He has literally 'made' the success which he reifies and accepts as an objective criterion, without recognising himself in it. But he has not 'made' it by liking the concert but rather by buying the ticket.*⁷

Adorno criticises the production of popular music as necessarily limited and standardised without bothering to examine its meanings for its audience. The system of production, the form the music itself takes, and the over-emotive reactions of the audience all stand as symbols of alienation, an alienation rooted in the commodity nature of musical production and consumption grasped almost *a priori*.

A more contemporary and pervasive approach is the familiar position wherein the economic 'base' determines the superstructural relations of meaning, a 'political economy' of culture.⁸ For theorists of this school the ability to generate meanings is considered as an exercise of power which is seen as an effect of the relations of ownership and control of the means of production. Two reductions make this position possible in relation to popular music, and limit its usefulness.

First, there is little regard for the differing relations of production (and consumption) which exist in different national formations. In many works on the production and use of popular music the systems of production and market management in the USA and UK record industries are collapsed into one, seen as essentially the same.⁹ This is a particular feature of work concentrating on the production of 'rock' music. Rock has come to represent both all the diverse forms of popular music since 1955, and all forms which exist throughout the USA, the UK and Europe: rock production represents *all* production. This leaves no room, or necessity, for any examination of the lineages of the continent, let alone the Third World.¹⁰

Secondly, the social relations of record production and consumption are reduced to the struggle between the recording artists to express their 'natural' creativity, and the record company to maximise profits. The complex of relations between musicians, producers, engineers, executives, accountants etc, with all their divergent views on what will sell, what sounds 'good', etc, are passed over. That musicians should actively collaborate with executives to make money is out of the question (if they do their music is obviously beyond the pale; this is a sign of its move from 'rock' to 'pop'). In these terms punk rock is conceived of in terms of its 'threat to the major record companies who struggle for a time to overcome it'¹¹. The 'failure' of punk is not seen in terms of the discursive limits within which it exists¹² nor in the decision of many punk musicians to escape from their self-imposed poverty, but in terms of the major record companies re-establishing their hegemony by dominating the means of production and distribution (a minor cause of punk's restricted effectivity).¹³ Here an idea of independence is set up wherein political and discursive struggles are subordinated to a freedom from economic and technological determination: we could all be free if only we could take possession of the means of production, regardless of the form of music we play. Yet, although no one could accuse the National Front's

⁷ Quoted in Dick Bradley, *op cit*, pp 27-28.

⁸ See Nicholas Garnham, 'A Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass Communications', *Media, Culture and Society*, April 1979, vol 1 no 2, pp 123-146.

⁹ For example, Dave Harker, *One For The Money*, London, Hutchinson, 1980; Dave Elliott, *The Rock Music Industry*, Unit 24 of the Open University Popular Culture course (U203), Open University Press; and to some extent Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll*, London, Constable, 1983.

¹⁰ See, however, Jean-Pierre Vignolle, 'Mixing Genres and Reaching the Public: The Production of Popular Music', *Social Science Information* 19 (1), 1980, pp 79-105 (on France); *Popular Music* (3) 1983; and Roger Wallis and Krister Malm, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples*, London, Constable, 1984.

¹¹ Lez Cooke, 'Popular Culture and Rock Music',

¹² Simon Frith,
'Music For
Pleasure', *Screen
Education* no 34,
Spring 1980,
pp 51-61.

¹³ On current trends
in the record
industry, see Phil
Hardy, *The British
Record Industry*,
International
Association for the
Study of Popular
Music (UK)
Working Paper
(forthcoming,
1984).

¹⁴ David Brazil,
'Spittin' Hate at
the Future of Rock
'n' Roll', the
Leveller, October
1979, no 31,
pp 18-19.

¹⁵ See Simon Frith,
Sound Effects, op
cit, chapter 3.

¹⁶ David Thomas
points out that
merchandising
companies now
finance tours in
the USA. See
'Lawyers, Guns
and Money', the
Face, January
1984, no 45,
pp 18-20.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault,
Power/Knowledge,
London,
Harvester, 1980,
esp pp 203-204.

¹⁸ London,
Constable, 1978.
Sound Effects,

White Records label of not being 'independent', was it 'liberating'?¹⁴ Anything that threatens company profits is seen as in some way liberating (in what way is unclear—home taping, for example, merely reorganises company product).

Relations of production and consumption must be seen in a much more subtle way. The connections between the record industry and other technological industries (musical instruments, studio technology, video and cable) must be considered in terms of (1) the requirements of the capitals involved; (2) the professional ideologies of the relevant personnel (engineers, film-makers etc) in regard to skill, career success, and technical innovation and expertise; and (3) the musicians who want (need!) to create new sounds in order to sell records (to be 'fresh' but not too different).

Similarly, the tendency to consider the audience for the record industry's product as a homogeneous object, out of control of its own pleasures and meanings, must be eschewed in favour of an exploration of the heterogeneous nature of the meanings and pleasures which consumption generates. Rather than reducing pleasure to a common denominator it is the ability to appeal to such heterogeneity which enables a musical text to attain mass popularity and commercial success. (As Frith has pointed out, in popular music mass appeal has favourable aesthetic meanings.¹⁵) The discursive links which arise between musicians and audiences need to be explored both in terms of the economic relations between merchandising and advertising companies, and the formation of imaginary relations and the 'will to know' which permeates social life.¹⁶ Power must be considered as a web of complex connections between musicians, executives and audiences rather than as rigid relations built into an economic order. Any hegemony will be partial, accidental and contingent.¹⁷

Authenticity

Beyond much of the writing examined above lies the discursive formation of authenticity. It is common to examine contemporary popular music in terms of an opposition between a radical 'rock' music and a submissive, commercialised 'pop' music, dividing texts into subcultural or mass cultural forms. This conflates nearly all post-1955 popular Western musics into one of two essentialist forms, prioritising the study of the 'oppositional' rock over 'pop'. Simon Frith, in *The Sociology of Rock*¹⁸, makes this distinction, as do many other writers. Lez Cooke illustrates the absurdities this can lead to when he writes: 'rock music and its derivatives—rock and roll, psychedelic rock, glam rock, punk rock, etc...'.¹⁹ Rock and roll *derives* from 'rock'? This misunderstands both the history of the music and the place of 'rock' in discourses on popular music. An archaeological examination of the term reveals that it appears (split from its addendum) during the late sixties as part of a dichotomy of 'rock'/'pop' used by music journalists and musicians. They separated certain forms of popular music (psychedelic and progressive rock) from

forms designated as 'stereotyped and clichéd' and 'too commercial'.²⁰ This opposition is central to the emergence of 'rock' in music journalism, musicians' self-conceptions and (as we shall see) subculturalist theories.²¹ Rock music is considered to be in itself a radical and oppositional form, and the actions of rock musicians and their followers (be they Teds, Skins or Punks), are radical by their relation to rock music and culture. Thus the tendency in Cultural Studies to regard deviance as more authentic than conformity, so that, in examining 'youth' and their relations to music, attention has concentrated upon certain spectacular subcultural forms rather than the more 'normal' forms of consumption. Paradoxically, this results in studies of the history of pop music, its hit records, million-selling groups, multi-national record companies, which neglect the audiences supporting these. Such writing concentrates instead on subcultures which chronologically co-exist with 'the hit-makers' but have few direct links with the mass market audience.²²

It was during the construction of, and debate on, the 'counter-culture' in the mid-sixties, when the discursive roots of subculturalist thought emerged, that music journalists established themselves as the 'authorities of delimitation' over the 'grids of specification' in which the historicist essentialism of 'rock' appears.²³ It was they who sorted out musicians and musics into authentic 'rock' and commercial 'pop'. A similar division between a form of music through which musicians are seen as expressing their 'true' selves, while others merely play alienated commercial music occurs in the late 1920s, when the categories 'hot' jazz and 'commercial dance music' were set up by journalists working for *Melody Maker*, *Rhythm* and later *Hot News* and *Swing Music*. In both cases this delineation of the music into two strict camps results from a complex set of relations where economics has a part but is by no means determinant. Part of the genesis of this division lies in the attempt by those who enjoy the music to defend it against those, such as Adorno, who criticise it. In both cases fans become journalists, then critics, and occasionally even academics. However the construction and usage of discursive forms such as 'rock' has caused writers to turn from examining the everyday uses and meanings of popular music and to concentrate on forms of social action assumed to be potentially revolutionary. Such examinations are of limited use, precluding as they do the consideration of the role of popular music in the majority of peoples' everyday lives and pleasures.

The Pursuit of the Text

Until quite recently the study of musical texts (of which the record is but one form) has tended to be limited to a monolinear, subjectivist account of the lyrics of a recorded song. Arguably this is caused by Western philosophy's tendency to consider speech to be more authentic and expressive than any inscribed text (it is interesting that jazz musicians tend to rise in critics' estimation when they make their instruments 'speak'). In recent years attempts have been made to open up this limited

while questioning this division and uncovering its archaeology, does not entirely shake it off.

¹⁹ Lez Cooke, op cit, p 46.

²⁰ See Graham Vulliamy, 'Music and the Mass Culture Debate' (esp pp 185-195) in John Shepard et al, *Whose Music?*, Latimar, 1977; and Mark Hustwitt, 'Changing the Scenery?', *The Independent Record Sector in Britain since the 1920s* (paper given at the British Sociology Association Conference, April 1983).

²¹ See Gary Clarke, *Defending Skijumpers: A Critique of Theories of Youth Subcultures*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Stencilled Paper no 71.

²² *ibid*; Angela McRobbie 'Settling Accounts With Subcultures', *Screen Education* no 34, Spring 1980, pp 37-49; and Kevin Sampson 'The Ins & Outs of High St Fashion', *the Face*, July 1983, no 39.

²³ I'm drawing here on Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of*

approach to understanding the meaning of popular musical texts, but all remain steadfastly subjectivist. Some merely reproduce the writers' own view of a text's meaning, often using pseudo-scientific methods (such as information theory or semiotics) to support their arguments. Others, such as the subculturalists, impute specific meanings to social groups which, as Clarke points out, often have more to do with their own preoccupations and preconceptions than those of the subcultures they study.²⁴

This kind of examination has been most fully carried out by Dick Hebdige and Paul Willis, and is represented in the field of popular music studies by the work of John Shepard.²⁵ The styles which all these writers bring to bear are diverse, ranging from Shepard's careful and interesting musicological understandings, to Hebdige's almost throwaway *bricollage* of theory, fashion and fiction. It is Willis that has set out the theoretical underpinnings of this approach most clearly. For him the core to the understanding of subcultures is the examination of its homological relation, which is:

*the continuous play between the group and a particular item [e.g. a record] which produces specific styles, meanings, contents, and forms of consciousness. The artefact, object or institution in such a relationship must consistently serve the group at a number of levels with meanings, particular attitudes, bearings and consciousness. . . . Items which have this kind of relationship to a social group are likely to be differentially sought out and pursued by, rather than randomly proximate to, a social group.*²⁶

Despite the careful examination of the subcultures which are built up by these relationships, Willis fails to explain the way in which such a homological relation is worked, how the unity he perceives is constructed and projected. His attempt to produce a historical category, 'the integral', fails to fulfill the need to examine the process of change and recurrence existing in subcultural forms. Relations of formation and dissipation cannot be explained, and as such are ignored and the subculture is presented as a static assembly, idealised from fragments and practices existing over time. It has been argued that this approach produces 'snapshots' of the continuously changing shifts of style and fashion, which can then be used as part of an examination of the way in which mythological elements hang in the air signifying beyond their conjuncture of formation. This is certainly one way out of the closed system that Willis produces and necessitates a turn from subcultures to the way in which records, clothes, places etc, are drawn on by 'normal' people in their everyday lives. It does not confront the problem of how either subcultures or 'normal' people arrange these elements.

Here I will return to Foucault's work, for it is at the level of discourse that homologies and mythologies exist in their construction, reconstruction and de(con)struction. For Foucault any unity which exists does so primarily as discursive relations, creating objects rather than referring to them, positioning subjects as objects, and in places where only certain things can validly be said, and whose position within discursive relations

²⁴ Gary Clarke, op cit, pp 1-4.

²⁵ See Dick Hebdige *Subculture*, London, Methuen, 1979; Paul Willis, *Profane Culture*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; John Shepard, 'A Theoretical Model for the Sociomusicological Analysis of Popular Musics', *Popular Music* (2), 1982.

²⁶ Paul Willis, op cit, p 191.

grants power to their statements. Such discursive formations delimit a field of objects, grant the legitimate perspectives for agents of knowledge, and fix the norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories, with each discursive practice implying a play of prescriptions that designates exclusions and choices.

The unity which we perceive any subculture to have, and which those within it may feel it has, is a unity grounded and sustained in discourse, material practices grasped in discourse. Debates and disagreements, additions and deletions, all exist within a formation of discursive practices which in a series of historical moments are taken up by writers as subcultural forms. But these have no unity in themselves, no natural affinity; they go together because people force them together and speak of them as going together, creating in such usages unspoken, unformalised, unities. Thus there is nothing particularly special about those groups which have been examined by subculturalist writers, except that at certain times they have seemed to be more visible than other groups. Such study has concerned itself with the self-conscious elitist elements of the popular music audience, or with marginalised elements whose music may have once been popular.

One of the major features of subcultural analysis has been the appropriation of conceptual tools from literary and film studies. But their usefulness has proved to be limited (and criticism of these methods perhaps should reflect back into those disciplines). Lez Cooke's recent review of the Open University 'Popular Culture' course²⁷ is an instructive example of the difficulties such usage creates. It is undoubtedly problematic to theorise music in terms of narrative forms like the novelistic, and Cooke's use of the concept of the Classic Realist Text (hereafter CRT) reveals the weakness of such comparisons. He defines the CRT as:

a narrative which leads to closure, a transparent representation of the world, and a historical composition of discourses. . . . Just as narrative progression leads to closure in the Classic Realist Text so rock and pop music texts 'depend on simple harmonic progressions' which lead the listener through the text. In most pop and much rock music these harmonic progressions lead to a 'harmonious' closure.

The harmonic narrative creates the necessary closure which constitutes musical texts as CRTs, although their transparency is more difficult to pin down, since 'music cannot be said to refer to an external referent', although we can identify 'preferred' and 'subordinate' readings.²⁸

Leaving aside the harmonic closure of much 'classical' music and the complexities of musical referring, I feel that this adds very little to our understanding of musical texts. (It does not even make clear what a music text is, where are its boundaries?) Why is the harmonic to be privileged over other potential closures, of rhythm, melody, instrumentation? It has been argued that it is the very tension generated between the harmonic structure and the performance which generates our pleasures of the music.²⁹ Is such a closure thus transparent to all? Is a harmonic

²⁷ Lez Cooke, op cit, pp 47-8.

²⁸ See Iain Chambers, 'It's More Than A Song To Sing - Music, Cultural Analysis and the Blues', *Anglistica* XXII (1) 1979 (Naples University).

²⁹ For example, see Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980.

³⁰ For a Lacanian examination, see Barbara Bradby and Brian Torode, 'Song-Work: The Musical Inclusion, Exclusion and Representation of Women' (paper given at the British Sociology Association Conference, April 1982); and for a different viewpoint, Sue Clarke and Simon Emmerson, 'Rock and Sexuality', unpublished ms.

³¹ Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, 'Rock and Sexuality', *Screen Education* no 29, Winter 1978/79, pp 3-19. For a very interesting critique of this see Sue Clarke and Simon Emmerson, *op cit*.

³² Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, *op cit*, p 19; cf Richard Dyer, 'In Defence of Disco', *Gay Left* no 9, 1979.

³³ Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, *op cit*, p 15.

³⁴ Jenny Taylor and Dave Laing, 'Disco-Pleasure-Discourse' *Screen Education* no 31, Summer 1979, pp 43-48; Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in Stephen Heath (ed), *Image-Music-Text*, London, Fontana,

closure, if it exists, sufficient to dub a text a CRT? How does the harmonic relate to 'realism' as Film Studies has constructed it? Cooke's later reference to the 'primal' place of rhythm, as an essential part of musical experience is an interesting throwback to Adorno, who saw rhythm as coming to dominate popular music. 'Primal' can of course take us into psychoanalytic examinations of music³⁰, following the route taken by Kristeva perhaps, but here we must be careful not to slip into reductionism and subjectivism.

The division of readings into preferred and subordinate which Cooke celebrates is equally problematic (preferred by whom? subordinated how?). This division has the effect of reproducing the opposition of 'rock' discourse between authentic and inauthentic musics. It appears, worked out to its fullest extent, in the work of Frith and McRobbie³¹ which remains the best and most careful examination the everyday use of popular music. Their indictment of disco music's lack of 'human urges... hints of passion'³² is a judgement rather than an analysis, and is reproduced in their discussion of Tammy Wynette and Helen Reddy. The latter's voice is described as *in itself* that 'of the idealised consumer', while Wynette's:

*involves a knowledge of the world... 'Sometimes it's hard to be a woman' [she] begins, and you can hear that it's hard and you can hear that [she] knows why...'*³³

The source of such meanings is positioned in the text, how they are produced and selected, how Wynette's *submissive* lyric is overcome by her voice is not examined. Taylor and Laing's attempt to avoid this subjectivism by drawing on Barthes' use of the pheno-song/geno-song conceptualisation is equally limited because it fails to note that ideas of the body are constructed in discourse, and that Barthes' feelings of *jouissance*, created by the 'grain' of the voice moving beyond communication, representation, is itself part of a specific process of ordering the body. Barthes' distinction inevitably collapses into an intuitive distinction between those with 'grain' (authentic) and those without it (inauthentic).³⁴

On the whole, then, such analyses of popular music have tended to abstract musical texts from their possible diversity of readings, collapsing these into a single meaning produced by a specific form of use (sub-cultural, 'art', commercial). The indeterminacy of musical texts has been noted, but writers attempt to eliminate it rather than explore it. We can begin a reappraisal of this policy with Frith and McRobbie's examination of 'cock-rock' and 'teeny-bop' music. It is important to present a critique of this text (and that of Barthes' essay) because they are increasingly becoming the model for Cultural Studies teaching on popular music.

Frith and McRobbie examine how forms of rock music position subjects within relations which create and recreate forms of gender specific behaviour and sexual pleasure. They set up categories which are read back from specific practices in a highly selective way (like all subculturalist writing). 'Cock-rock' is characterised by concert going, the phys-

ical aggressiveness of performance, and the harsh sounds of heavy metal music. 'Teen-y-bop' is characterised by a 'bedroom culture', by romantic music, and the image of the androgynous (male) idol. This ignores, on the one hand, the 'bedroom culture' of heavy metal, the rituals of 'teeny-bopper' concert going, and the generalised commodification of 'idols' and the pervasive 'will to know' such idols. On the other, it passes over the use of heavy metal by girls to redefine their sexuality and pleasures, and, as Frith has recently suggested, that possibly 'pop romance, of all sorts, means more to men than women... [since] girls have no illusions about husbands'.³⁵ We must be careful here not to jump too much the other way and deny women any romantic fantasy at all (surely Barry Manilow is the prime example of this relation) nor see 'new' forms of music (e.g. punk and the recent revival of disco's fortunes) as escaping the discursive limits of past forms; we must in fact question such generalisations *per se*. What is important, as Gary Clarke points out³⁶, is that we stop theorising relations between texts and audiences and start attempting to discover them. Historical work is also necessary here, lest the current diversity of popular musics be seen as specifically 'post-punk'. The concentration on the history of rock has obscured the great diversity of popular music current in Britain in the early fifties, which are now being recovered by musicians yet remain ignored by most academics.

Those examining the popular music text have yet to accept and utilise Jacques Derrida's critique³⁷ of the Saussurian semiotics with which they now experiment. Derrida denies that there can be either any fixity of meaning, or that the signifying process, the free play of sign on sign, can be exhausted or ended – there is no transcendental signified, no ultimate fixed, true, immutable or closed meaning. Instead he proposes that each sign exists within a play of *différance*, each differing from, and deferring to, each other. Derrida's argument is particularly apt for musical texts, which show a great amount of 'play' in their signification. Philip Tagg's fascinating empirical work shows the diversity of signification which can be generated from relatively short and apparently banal musics. Tagg's work on the theme from *Kojak* and the Abba song 'Fernando'³⁸ breaks these down into the 'minimal units of expression in any given musical style'. By using these comparatively, 'describing music by means of other music', he reveals a text's *trace* and intertextuality.³⁹ From *Kojak* 350 'interobjective comparisons' are made, from 'Fernando' about 130. This work, too complex to summarise here, is well worth exploring, as the most extensive examination of the structure of musical texts and their continuous referencing. Although limited by the population from whom Tagg obtained his comparisons – Swedish musicologists, jazz musicians and students⁴⁰ – it could be expanded upon: comparisons could be drawn across a range of differences, of age, gender, race, region and class, examined alongside the complexities of the emergence of meaning, its construction, circulation, dissipation and abandonment within these relations, and how the production of musical meanings is limited.

1977, esp. pp 188-9.

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³⁵ Simon Frith, 'Hooked on Love', *New Society*, July 23 1981, no 975.

³⁶ Gary Clarke, *op cit*.

³⁷ His most thorough critique of Saussure is in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins, 1976; see also Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, London, Methuen 1982.

³⁸ cf Philip Tagg, *op cit*.

³⁹ Tagg, *ibid*, pp 48-49.

⁴⁰ Philip Tagg, *Kojak – 50 Seconds of Television Music*, Gothenberg University, 1979, p 251, note 389.

⁴¹ See Richard Middleton, "'Play it again Sam': Some Notes on the Productivity of Repetition in Popular Music", *Popular Music* (3), 1983.

⁴² At a conference on teaching popular music organised by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (UK), November 1983.

Popular music is often written of in terms of its repetitive form, but rather than conceiving it as the repetition of the same sign over and over, it might be more useful to consider this repeating of musemes as *recurrence*. This refers to the reproduction of the same sign, conceptualised as a building of like on like, but allowing for meaning to shift as this occurs. A concept like recurrence opens up the play of the text, making the same sign's meaning less fixed. Rhythm, for example, would not connote a single signification but act as both a signifying practice leading us through the text, and a *trace* referring us to, say, connotations such as 'this is a dance record', and differing and deferring to melody, harmony etc. (Similar sources of recurrence are drones, *ostinati* and melodies themselves⁴¹.) As such recurrence is more than a simple repetition and this moves us beyond treating such structuring as 'standardised', giving each set of recurrent signs a dynamic of its own. It should also make us consider the effect of hearing the 'same' record for a second, third and further times, as meanings will amass through successive plays, and to begin to investigate our ability to predict what a previously unheard text will do next.

A second point to bear in mind relates more directly to the teaching of popular music. Simon Frith recently pointed out that the teaching of popular music is problematised by the very diversity of its subject and of people's tastes.⁴² What is at any moment 'popular' is not necessarily everybody's favourite music. To talk about heavy metal to a classroom of students will alienate as many as it interests. People's musical tastes are not only diverse, but strongly defended and highly prejudicial. Popularity will thus remain an abstract term, and complicates what can be taken for granted when 'popular music' becomes a curriculum subject.

Finally, it must be mentioned that this diversity of meaning is both a source of strength and of weakness in studying popular music politically. Any intended political 'message' in the music can be easily undermined by the forms of presentation within which it exists: Radio One, *Smash Hits*, Pop Quiz, the *Daily Mirror* Pop Club etc. 'Rock' does not escape representation as a part of an ephemeral 'light entertainment'. Yet this indeterminacy also offers a salient advantage. The lack of any concrete closure of a musical text means that it can easily be appropriated and read and re-read for ironic, subversive and political meanings (though these must not be too easily granted). These can provide an anchor for pedagogic and political practice. Rather than seeking to pin down the meaning of popular music, its 'play' should be politically explored, exploited and directed.

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FIELDS IN VISION: SPORT AND REPRESENTATION

GARRY WHANNEL PREVIEWS
A FORTHCOMING DAY SCHOOL

The term 'sport' is so familiar that it seems absurd to begin by asking to what it refers. Yet, like all common-sense words, its apparent naturalness conceals a more complex history. *Sport* is an umbrella term that we now take to denote a large number of social practices involving the competitive performance of rule-prescribed tasks requiring physical skill. But the term was historically formed. In the eighteenth century it referred predominantly to aristocratic field pursuits – hunting, shooting and fishing – the leisure activities of the sporting gentleman. A rather different inflection linked *sporting* to gambling. By the mid-nineteenth century a different meaning had formed around the concept of the amateur gentleman, the ideology of fair play and the male team sports of the reformed public schools. By the beginning of the twentieth century a third meaning referenced the growing social practice of spectator sport, and the development of commercial forms of sport.

In the twentieth century the last two meanings have come to dominate and an increasing unity has developed around the concept of a *world of sport* – a world with its own internal coherence, neatly insulated from the outside world. It is precisely the formation of this discourse that has given 'keep politics out of sport' its strength as an ideological theme.

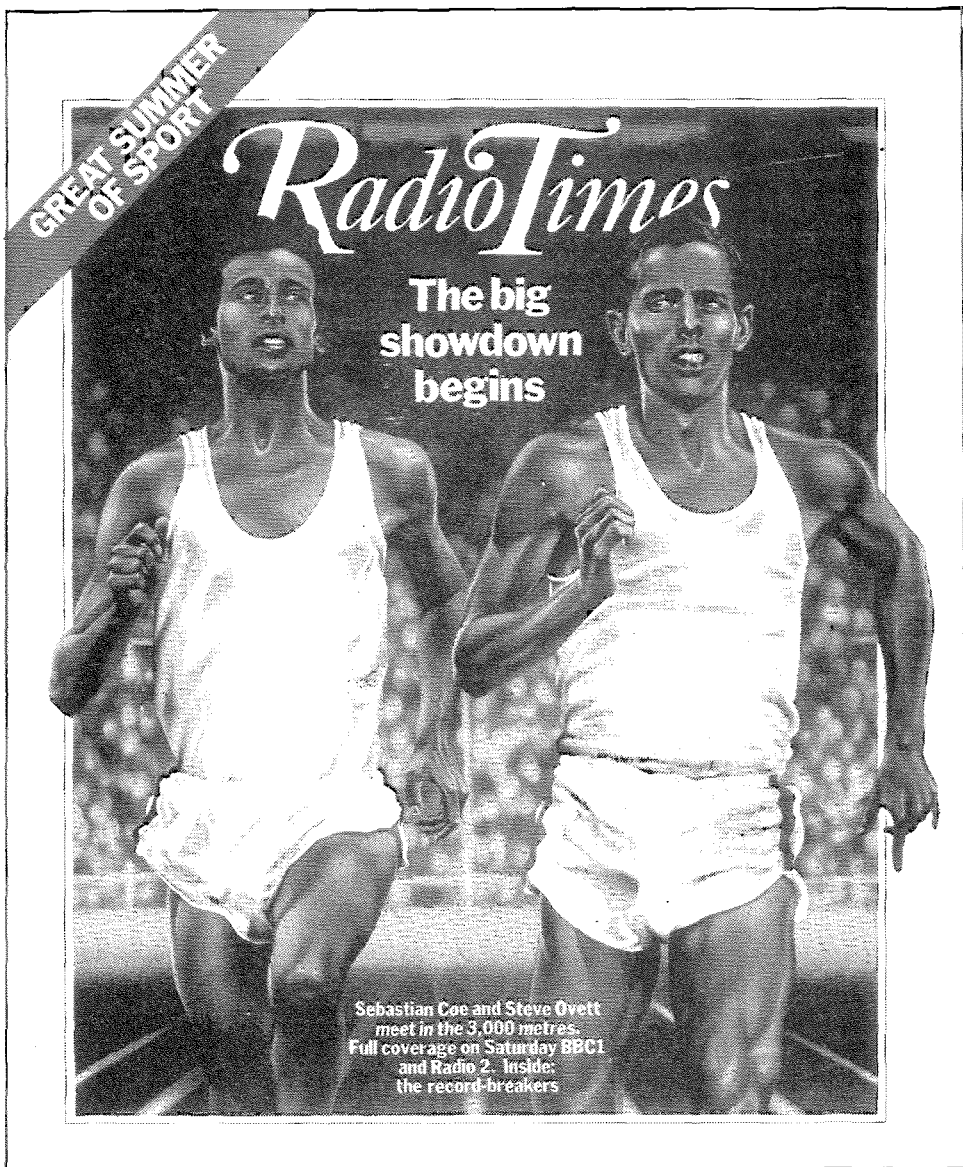
The symbolic unity forged by the term 'sport' between such diverse social practices as rugby, tennis, motor racing and swimming must be seen as in part a product of practices of

representation. Its origins as a pertinent social label in its present sense must be sought in such places as boys' magazines, the emergence of sport sections in newspapers and magazines and in the formation of outside broadcasting as a sub-category of broadcasting. In particular, the daily practices of television and the press constantly mark for us the boundaries of the world of sport, presented as a distinct category within the geography of schedule and page layout alike.

However, the boundaries of sport as a field of representations can be seen as blurred in some areas. Factual and fictional discourses have drawn upon each other. The tradition of the sporting hero provides a structure for understanding the career of both Roy of the Rovers and Kevin Keegan. The story of the Coe-Ovett races dominated television coverage of the Moscow Olympics because it so effectively offered itself, and was offered to us, as a 'perfect' structured narrative – journalistically it was the archetypal 'good story'.

The worlds of sport and show business meet upon the ground of stardom and competition. New programme forms (*Pro-Celebrity Snooker*, *Around With Alliss*, *Superstars*) mark the contacts between the two worlds. Popular entertainment forms like quiz and game shows have adopted the physical dimension and representational styles of television sport (*It's a Knock-Out*, *Jeux Sans Frontières*, *The Krypton Factor*).

In the wake of the fitness boom sports clothing has become adopted as fashion, while the values



Coe and Ovett as Olympic rivals on the cover of the *Radio Times*.

of fashion have reciprocally transformed the styles of sportswear. A heightened competitiveness has entered into fields like fitness and dance, as seen in that articulation of narcissism and the work ethic within *Fame*.

So, while *sport* denotes a bounded universe, it is one in transformative contact with discourses from narrative fiction, show business and fashion. It may well be that it is these points of contact that constitute the most revealing areas for analysis—as sites in which the articulation of contradictory ideological themes is at its most dynamic.

The *Radio Times* cover reproduced in this article illustrates some of these points. A painting rather than a photo, it is a very selective construction. It accentuates the physicality of the bodies, imparting an eroticised quality. It singles out two individuals, identifiable as top stars, and eliminates most other detail. The background is a grey-blue blur in which we cannot distinguish the crowd, track officials or other athletes. The competitors are portrayed in strips devoid of numbers, ads, logos or design features denoting manufacturer. The eyelines are rendered so as to present the two athletes staring at each other.

The page layout links the event to the BBC's 'great summer of sport', and hence implicitly to the close identity established between major sport events and the BBC's coverage of them. The slogan 'the big showdown' further emphasises the gladiatorial nature of the confrontation. Three factors make the factual/fictional play within this image of particular interest. First, this portrayal of two rival athletes in Olympian white (with all the obvious implications of the ancient Greeks) appeared in the wake of the success of *Chariots of Fire*. Second, Coe and Ovett have, to the best of my knowledge, never appeared in this position in an actual race. Third, and most ironically, due to illness and injury Coe did not run in the advertised race, Ovett ran well below his best, finishing seventh, and while television was able to show a highly exciting race, 'the big showdown' was between Dave Moorcroft and Sidney Maree.

Why does sport and its representation warrant specific attention? Involvement in sport, whether as spectator or participant is a social practice on a significant scale in Britain. Over a fifth of UK television time is occupied by sport. Major sport

occasions have an almost unique ability to win and hold vast television audiences outside peak viewing time. Sport in representation constitutes ground on which ideological themes of nation, gender, class and competitive individualism are articulated in complex and contradictory fashion.

I want to offer a brief survey of some existing work in this area, concentrating on four themes: realist conventions and the process of construction; ideological themes and modes of address; presentation of gender, physicality and sexuality; economic transformation and the problems of determination.

I

The visual style of much sport coverage employs the same conventions, such as the 180 degree rule, common to classical narrative film.

Buscombe *et al*¹ and Peters² both suggest that the effect is to naturalise the coverage, minimising audience awareness of the mediating effect of television. *Football on Television* describes the production through camera placement of a point of view which is that of an 'ideal' spectator. Peters' *Television Coverage of Sport* discusses the practices of lens use, framing, zooming and cutting whereby individualisation is produced, centering the audience upon the expressive codes of players' faces.

The attempt of this work to elaborate a visual theory of actuality coverage meant less attention was paid to the anchoring effects of commentary, but *Football on Television* offers an invaluable comparison of visual style in German and British football coverage—suggesting British television adopts tighter framing and faster cutting patterns, with greater use of the close-up. There is great scope in similar comparisons between Australian and British cricket, or American and British tennis on television.³

Just as camera positions, cutting patterns, and verbal elements shape the coverage, they also effect exclusions, marking again the bounded

¹ Edward Buscombe (ed), *Football on Television*, British Film Institute Television Monograph, London, 1974.

² Roy Peters, *Television Coverage of Sport*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Stencilled Paper, Birmingham, 1976.

³ The 'Action Replay' event (details below) will include a presentation on tennis coverage.

102 universe of sport. Serge Daney⁴ uses the French term *hors-champ*⁵ to describe this systematic exclusion of elements from representation. Referring to the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, he argues that, just as the game is circumscribed by the surface of the playing area and cannot leave it, so the cameras and coverage are caught in the confines of the stadium, visually and verbally excluding the events of repression and torture outside.⁶

Other sections of *Football on Television* examine the ways that the *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, the programmes' title sequences and their panel-of-expert discussions all serve to set the scene, to frame events and to offer readings in advance. The panels, rooted in expertise, yet working across the expert/populist tension characteristic of actuality television, establish star characters as central to the forthcoming narrative: as such, they stand at the interface between event, analysis and entertainment.⁷

The implication of the stress on the process of construction – the insistence that television does not simply cover events, but transforms them into stories – is to raise questions about the polarity between actuality and fiction. Television sport can clearly be seen in terms of dramatic presentation and analysed as a form of narrative construction.⁸ Key questions ('who will win?' etc) are posed, enigmas established and the promise made that – within the structure both of sport itself and its television form – after delays, we will be provided with answers. Hence the

intense dissatisfaction with which television has to negotiate its way around drawn games or absences of goals.⁹

The attempt to analyse television sport from the standpoint of the conventions of realism does, it seems to me, neglect the prominence of apparently non-realist elements. Action replays, slow motion repeats, freeze-frames, inserts, split-screens, superimpositions, the addition of statistics, and the meta-discourse provided by expert analysis all, arguably, emphasise, rather than conceal, the process of mediation. Birrell and Loy¹⁰, in the course of discussing McLuhan, offer an interesting means of analysis. They suggest that television produces five transformations not available to a live audience in the stadium. The size of the image can be changed; time compressed (highlights); time slowed, speeded or stopped; an isolated action singled out; and additional information provided. Adapting this, television sport could be conceptualised as a series of transformations of time and space. The articulating principle of these transformations would be the need to render actuality into 'good television'.¹¹

It is noteworthy that *Football on Television* quotes Harry Carpenter's view that boxing is the most adaptable sport for television, as it offers maximum action within minimum space. It is clear that a low level of transformation is needed and boxing, like tennis, can be covered in a visually simple style. Boxing rarely uses more than two medium shots during rounds, BBC tennis shows almost every rally with one long shot. By comparison, golf needs a high level of transformation, with multiple cameras, split screens, cross cutting between different groups of golfers on different parts of the course, producing a complex multiple narrative, and the frequent addition of statistical information, if it is to meet the requirements of 'good television'.

⁴ Serge Daney, 'Le Sport Dans La Télévision', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no 292, p. 43. For a related discussion, see also *Téléciné* no 229, June 1978.

⁵ 'Hors-champ' is difficult to translate elegantly. It means, strictly in terms of film technique, what is outside the field of view, and so could be translated as off-screen space. Here, however, Daney uses it to refer also to things being outside the field of play, in the sporting sense.

⁶ For discussion of 1978 World Cup coverage see also Edward Buscombe *et al*, 'Spoilsports', *Time Out*, July 2, 1978.

⁷ See also discussion of Cup Final coverage in Len Masterman, *Teaching About Television*, Macmillan, London 1980, pp 109-121.

⁸ Ian Colley and Gill Davies, 'Kissed by History: Football as Television Drama', in *Sporting Fictions*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham 1982, pp 189-208.

⁹ Garry Whannel, 'Narrative and Television Sport: The Coe and Ovett Story', in *Sporting Fictions*, *op cit*, pp 209-230.

¹⁰ Susan Birrell and John Loy, 'Media Sport: "Hot and Cool"', in *International Review of Sport Sociology*, vol 14 no 1, 1979.

¹¹ For more work situated in the American context, see *Journal of Communication* vol 27, 1977, special issue on television sport, and G Ivent, 'Pro Football and Television', in *Review of Sport and Leisure*, 1979.

Ideological analysis in this area has effectively two levels: the range of ideological elements articulated within and by the cultures surrounding particular sporting practices, and the ways in which these are selectively appropriated by the discourse of television sport. For example, both professional football and television place a high value upon commitment and work rate, but whereas football culture internally validates borderline practices like the professional foul, television maintains more rigorous moral boundaries, condemning such rule-breaking in strong terms. In current analytic work of sport, however, the two levels are not always clearly distinguished.

The work of Jean-Marie Brohm¹² portrays sport as an imperialist phenomenon, and a concentrated form of ruling ideology. In particular, it is seen as a form of sexual repression built upon sado-masochistic training regimes. (Note: a current Olympus advert features a male runner apparently crossing the pain threshold and the slogan 'We'll take you to hell and back'.) Brohm applies the theory of labour power to sport, developing the concept of 'Taylorisation of the body'—the process of training by which maximum productivity is extracted. While this is a very suggestive analysis, given the high prominence in television's discourse of 'commitment', 'courage', 'toughness', and 'work-rate', much of Brohm's analysis is somewhat marred by a one-dimensional functionalist mode.¹³

Hargreaves¹⁴ offers a more sophisticated analysis and a Gramsci-influenced investigation of the contradictory elements of sport cultures. The pieces in this collection reject the concept of

a single non-contradictory and uncontested dominant ideology. There is no neat fit between the values of sport, and the values of television. Television, according to its own formal needs, restructures a set of complex ideological elements present around sport itself.¹⁵

Clearly, one element of this reworking is the set of statements television offers about the nature of competition. Competitive activity provides the structure for a diverse set of programme forms, from straight quizzes (*Sale of The Century*, *Mastermind*); through game shows involving mental activity (*Play Your Cards Right*, *Blankety Blank*); physical activity (*Jeux Sans Frontières*); or a combination of both (*The Krypton Factor*); contests (*World Disco Dance Championship*, *Young Scientist of the Year*, *The Great Egg Race*); award programmes (*The BAFTA Awards*, *The Academy Awards*); pro-celebrity sports and other quasi-sport events (*Superstars*, *Britain's Strongest Man*); and mainstream sport programmes (*Grandstand*, *World of Sport*, *Sportsnight* etc). These diverse forms share a common need to work through contradictions between a competitive win-at-all-costs ideology, and a harmonious communality. Different resolutions are offered—in the *Krypton Factor*, as in much sport, winning is everything, whereas in *Mr and Mrs* all contestants win something. *Jeux Sans Frontières* reworks slapstick comedy as nationalistic fervour, and *Mastermind* prizes intellectual honour above material reward. *Blankety Blank* mocks its own prizes but, as in sport, losers rapidly disappear off screen, while winners are rewarded with the gift of movement, being allowed to rise from their chairs and enter the world of the celebrities.¹⁶

Clearly television sport celebrates the importance of victory. Winners are framed

¹² Jean-Marie Brohm, *Sport: A Prison of Measured Time*, Ink Links, London 1978.

¹³ For other analyses of sport ideology, see *Rip Off the Big Game*, Paul Hoch, Anchor, New York, 1972; Gerhard Vinnai, *Football Mania*, Ocean, London 1973; Garry Whannel, *Blowing The Whistle: The Politics of Sport*, Pluto, London 1973; Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record*, Columbia University Press, New York 1978; and Rex W Thompson, Sport and Ideology in Contemporary Society, in *International Review of Sport Sociology*, vol 13 no 2, 1978.

¹⁴ Jennifer Hargreaves (ed), *Sport Culture and Ideology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1982.

¹⁵ Alan Clarke and John Clarke, 'Highlights and Action Replays: Ideology Sport and the Mass Media', in Hargreaves (ed), op cit.

¹⁶ For discussion of quiz and game shows see John Tulloch, 'Gradgrind's Heirs—the Quiz and the Presentation of "Knowledge" by British Television', *Screen Education*, no 19, Summer 1976, pp 3-13; Adam Mills and Phil Rice, 'Quizzing The Popular', *Screen Education*, no 41, Winter/Spring 1982, pp 15-25; Garry Whannel, 'It's a Knock-Out: Constructing Communities', *Block* no 6, 1982; and John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television*, Methuen, London 1978, pp 142-158.

centre-screen for us and we follow them in their moment of triumph, while losers magically disappear. However this is always modified by other factors, in particular nationalism and the forging of a partisan audience identification. Our own winners are always celebrated visually and verbally, but in international coverage from overseas with a non-British winner, we may be offered a visual discourse of celebration, while on the verbal level there is an inquest as to why British hopes were let down. In coverage of sports for which no strong partisan identification can be forged owing to lack of British success, our attention is directed to other points of appeal—as in the aestheticisation of gymnastics, or the daring and danger of ski-jumping. Ice dancing has become, with the rise of Torvill and Dean, an interesting point of tension between aesthetic and competitive elements—grace and beauty measured in decimal points, with national pride at stake.

The representation of competition produces another contradiction within television—the need to produce a neutral discourse for a partisan audience. The coverage of the Cup Final is offered with an impartiality between opposing sides more scrupulous than any current affairs programme, to an audience largely divided by specific attachment to one side or the other. In televising international sport the conventions plainly shift—a greater identity is assumed, and constructed, between programme and audience, around the prospects and hopes of the English team in the World Cup. But even here the commentaries remain caught in a tension between national partisanship and journalistic conventions of neutrality. The problems are at their sharpest in the coverage of events involving Scotland, Wales or Ireland as subordinate ‘nations’ within the British State. We are used to a mode of address that marks England as ‘our’ team. As a national channel the BBC cannot sustain this for an England v. Scotland game and must lapse, not always with complete success, into a Cup Final-style impartiality.¹⁷

In the attempt to win and hold large audiences—popular television is always striving to produce a discourse of unity that can draw in the marginal

viewer. The tension between expertise and purism, and spectacle and excitement, within sport coverage is always going to be subject to a strong populist pull. The characteristic sport programme’s mode of address establishes from the outset a donor-recipient relation with the viewer. ‘Let me tell you what we’ve got for you this afternoon’, is a typical opening. The presenter occupies a dual role—personification in vision of the production team, the donor of sporting gifts; but at the same time a surrogate sports fan, one of us, our representative and fellow recipient, telling us ‘I’m sure we’re in for a real treat today’. This mode enables an easy connection with the domestic rituals of the audience, who are invited to get a drink and sit down to enjoy the ‘big event’.¹⁸ The mode of address attempts to construct an audience of armchair sport fans.

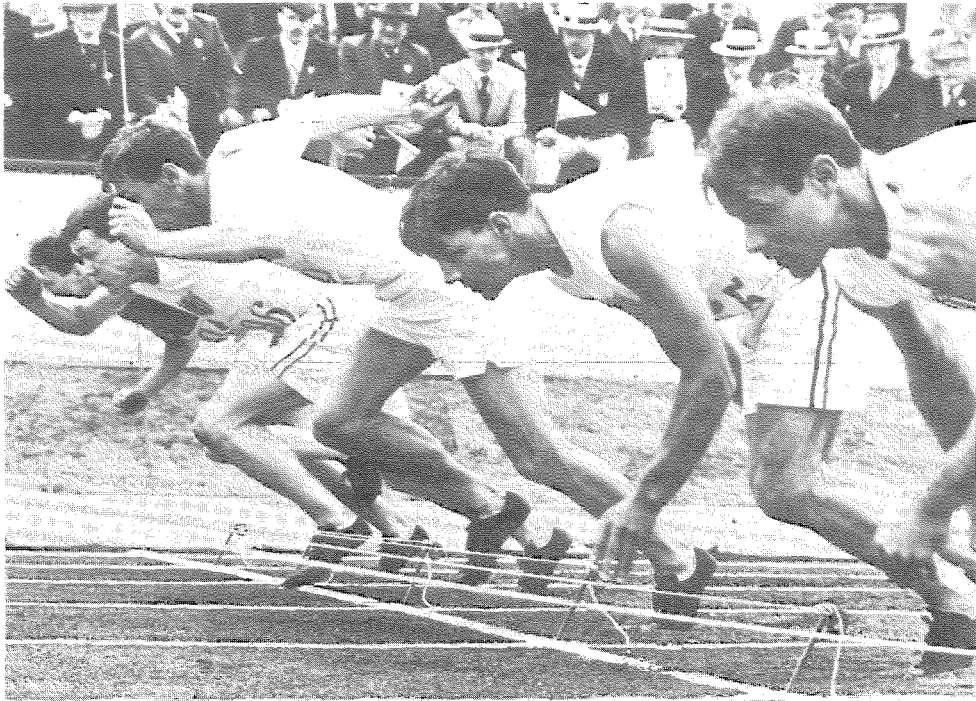
III

So far absent is any consideration of the crucial ideological structure within sport representation—gender. For just as the major sport institutions and the cultures surrounding the majority of sports are dominated by masculinity, so television relays and represents many of the crucial features of this dominance, not least a hierarchisation of content that constantly underlines men’s tennis, men’s athletics, and men’s sport generally as more worthy of attention than women’s events. This hierarchy is only reversed in those sports (gymnastics, ice skating) whose ‘aesthetic’ properties encode them as suitably ‘feminine’.

Sport offers a prime site for the ideological construction of gender difference. Rooted in the positivist empiricism of measurement, it appears constantly to offer a particular kind of evidence to reinforce common-sense logic—men are stronger than women, and at most physical activity perform better. Like all elements of common sense that become deeply embedded, this piece of ‘wisdom’ encapsulates many confusions in its insidious elision of the biological and the social.¹⁹ The big gap in performance is not between men and women, but between highly trained athletes of either sex and the rest of us. Top runners like Grete Waitz

¹⁷ For discussion of identification in television sport see Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ‘Television—Football—The World’, *Screen*, Winter 1978/79, vol 19 no 4, pp 45-59.

¹⁸ Garry Whannel, ‘Sit Down With Us: Television Sport as Armchair Theatre’, in *Leisure and the Media*, Leisure Studies Association 1983 Conference Papers.



Male athletes, male spectators: *Chariots of Fire*.

are faster than all but a few hundred men, and only male professionals can play golf like Nancy Lopez or tennis like Martina Navratilova. Recent research suggests that women's bodies are more efficient in events requiring stamina and women's performances in measureable events have rapidly narrowed the gap between women and men.²⁰ But the strength of the ideology is that it forces people to make the comparison at all, establishing sporting empiricism as a

measure of achievement, and male performance as a yardstick for women's sport.

The increasing prominence of women's sport in representation does constitute a tension around the traditional hierarchy of values that structures sport coverage. It is no longer quite as easy for women's events to be marginalised. What is still at stake, of course, are the terms of that representation, the extent to which an 'active woman' can be ideologically re-placed back into domestic discourse as the woman who 'took time off from husband and the kids' to win an Olympic medal.

The representation of sporting actuality produces a discourse about physicality (toughness, aggression, competitiveness, etc) from which sexuality is repressed. However, fictional portrayals of sport allow this repressed level to resurface and consequently many filmic representations of sport engage precisely with the relation between sport and masculinity.²¹ In both *Raging Bull* and *Chariots of Fire*, as in so many sport films, femininity is inscribed as distinctly outside and separate from the sporting world, just as masculinity is intrinsically bound up with it. There is a rare attempt to explore the

¹⁹ Paul Willis, 'Women in Sport in Ideology', in Hargreaves (ed) op cit. See also Christine Griffin *et al*, 'Women and Leisure', in Hargreaves (ed) op cit; M Ann Hall, *Sport and Gender, a Feminist Perspective on the Sociology of Sport*, Calgary University, Canada, 1975; Carole Oglesby, *Women in Sport: From Myth to Reality*, Lea and Febiger, Philadelphia 1978; Nancy Theberge, 'A Critique of Critiques: Radical and Feminist Writings on Sport', *Social Forces*, vol 60 no 2, December 1981.

²⁰ K F Dyer, *Catching up the Men*, Junction, London 1982. See also Jan Graydon, 'The Myth of Female Fragility', in *Action - The British Journal of Physical Education* vol 11 no 4, July 1980.

²¹ Pam Cook, 'Masculinity in Crisis', and Steve Neale, 'Chariots of Fire: Images of Men', both in *Screen* Sept/Oct 1982, vol 23 no 3-4, pp 39-46 and 47-53 respectively.

contradictions produced by an encounter between the two systems, sport and femininity, in the Australian film *Dawn*. The narrative follows Australian swimmer Dawn Fraser's uneasy negotiation of the contradictions of identity encountered by women in sport, exploring the options of being a tomboy, one-of-the-boys, or a lesbian, without resolving her own sense of cultural dislocation.

Fictional representations of sport on television have been relatively rare and not often successful. (Does anyone remember the BBC's '60s football club soap opera, *United*?) As in film, the sexuality repressed in actuality coverage is likely to resurface. A 1979 Granada series, *Fallen Hero*, featured a rugby league star whose career had been ended by injury. The narrative was structured around a series of losses and, by implication, impotence. The main character has been rejected by the Welsh community of his childhood for turning professional, abandoning rugby union for rugby league. We discover his wife is about to leave him, his stepson hates him and his father loathes him. It emerges that his real father is another man. A strong homology is established between the end of his sport career and his failures as a man.

To say sexuality is repressed in actuality coverage is not to say that it is absent. Little analysis has been done of the nature of this repressed level. Television sport offers marked contradictions between the presence at the visual level of sets of images for which a reading rooted in awareness of sexuality is possible, and the denial of sexuality at the verbal level. The high degree to which bodies are displayed to the gaze, the connotations of costume and posture, the physical contact and repertoire of gestures in the recent Winter Olympics, for example, would constitute a rich field for study, focusing perhaps on the giant slalom, the ice dancing and the two-man luge. (It is noteworthy that in the press storm over John Curry's supposedly 'gay' style of skating in 1976, television was largely silent.)

IV

A major problem for non-reductionist analysis has, of course, been the place of the economic and its relation to representation. Sport presents particular problems. One-day cricket was born

out of television's desire for some cheap popular programming for Sunday afternoon, the tobacco industry's desire to remain in television after the ban on advertising, Gillette's desire for an 'English' image, and cricket's desire to improve its finances. As a new version of cricket it has transformed both the finances and the image of the sport and produced a new style of representation. Packer's Channel Nine introduced extensive use of cameras at both ends of the ground, frequent action replays, microphones in the wicket to catch the sound of the stumps being hit and a general emphasis on the gladiatorial batsman v bowler aspect of the sport.²²

This is only the most dramatic example of transformation within sport in the last 25 years. Entrepreneurial interests have increasingly challenged the power and authority of old amateur paternalists who dominated sport organisation. Sponsorship money, which in Britain has risen from less than £1 million in 1966 to around £50 million now, has become crucial to the economics of sport. Most of this money goes to televised sports, and so sports are increasingly likely to contemplate radical changes to the structure of their events or the rules of their competitions to attract television.²³ Television's own definitions of sport, and which events work as 'good television', have become increasingly powerful as forces that shape the world outside television.²⁴ These forces have been crucial to both the rise of snooker, and the relative failure of squash, despite its large up-market clientele, to attract large sums in sponsorship. These processes of transformation cannot be grasped through analysis of

²² Bill Bonney, 'Packer and Televised Cricket', *Media Papers No 2*, New South Wales Institute of Technology, 1980, and for background, Henry Blofeld, *The Packer Affair*, Collins, London 1978.

²³ See Bruce Kidd, *The Political Economy of Sport, CAHPER Sociology of Sport Monograph Series*, Canada, 1978, for a discussion of economic forces in sport.

²⁴ It is possible to suggest that the Olympic Games have been transformed economically, politically and ideologically by the growth of the global television spectacle. See Alan Tomlinson and Garry Whannel (eds), *The Five Ring Circus*, Pluto, London 1984; and Gabrielle Bown, *2000 Million Televiewers*, Royal College of Arts, 1981, and the film, *Even Russian Soil Tastes Sweet*, by Gabrielle Bown.

representation alone, but require also analysis of the alarmingly direct relation between economic relations and cultural production that have come to characterise this sphere.

There is every reason to assume that representations of sport will be particularly prominent in the next few months. In addition to the usual attractions of the BBC's Summer of Sport, there will be the added bonus of Test Matches featuring the West Indies and saturation coverage of the Olympic Games. Just as the 1980 Olympiad was followed by a major feature film reworking many of the same themes (two British athletes competing over the same distances) that dominated its 'actuality' coverage, so this year's West Indies tour, most likely foregrounded in media representation with the image of cricket as

a duel between batsman and bowler, will shortly be pursued by Puttnam's current project, a film about the Bodyline tour of Australia. The diverse forms in which sport appears in representation and the reciprocal manner in which meanings move between the factual and the fictional, the filmic and the televisual deserve closer attention. 107

South East Arts, in association with the BFI and SEFT, are staging two events to explore some of these issues. 'Action Replay', a day event on Saturday, June 2, at Brighton Polytechnic (Eastbourne site), will feature presentations on television tennis, the 1980 Olympic Games coverage and *Chariots of Fire*. A weekend event has been scheduled for October 13-14. Further details from SEFT or BFI Education, 81 Dean Street, London W1.

ATMOSPHERE

MICHAEL COPEMAN REVIEWS 'SHADOWS FROM LIGHT'

The titles of *Shadows from Light*¹ feature the signatures of Bill Brandt and Steven Dwoskin. A woman speaks the first words: 'This film is a cinematographic journey through the photographic atmospheres of Bill Brandt.' The camera moves around a room heavily furnished with Victoriana and so deeply in shadow that it might be nothing more than a stage set. In it a naked woman takes poses which leave her face in darkness. The voice-over continues with a brief biography of Brandt: 'This man's eye... camera... space ... light...'. A child speaks lines from *Through the Looking Glass* as a face appears in a mirror: Brandt's face.

The camera moves on to show Brandt's photos framed, reflected, obscured, and another anonymous voice gives titles to some photos – not the nudes. Features in the photos gradually become recognisable as those in the set: this is Brandt's photographic space, but also his own place, his studio or home. An older voice, Brandt's, talks of how much of his work was luck. Individual photos are used as starting points for short camera journeys around what might be the scene of the original. The photos are posed in gardens, on walls, floors or furniture, as objects in the landscape. Editing and camera movement remake or distort the photos. There are references to various other forms of photographic exhibition.

The framed 'picture on the wall' of conventional TV is, for example, a point of departure here. Rather than simply identify the photo as 'Art', Dwoskin makes it a physical object. Taking Brandt's photographic constructions as

his guide, he attempts a filmic equivalent. A fifteen second exposure is held for fifteen seconds, opera hats are accompanied by operatic music on the soundtrack. A dreamlike quality is both suggested in the images and insisted upon in the voice-overs. Towards the end of the film the child-Alice voice asks where she is, and an older woman's voice replies, 'You would be nowhere ... you're only a sort of thing in his dream.' Such allusions attempt to link Brandt's work to an identifiable style in the fine arts – surrealism. (At one point in the film, a woman is seen to move a photo to reveal a shelf of kitchen utensils; she is naked. The relationship to surrealism that this suggests is an example of the failing of the surrealist premise that certain symbols will produce common reactions in a common subconscious: at the very least I doubt that 'his dreams' are the same as 'her dreams'.)

The conventional TV arts documentary works on the basis that art is a minority interest and therefore requires a certain kind of justification to interest the audience. When photography is treated this way it is specifically differentiated, from its use in advertisements, journalism and so on. The conventional presentation requires that photography take on the mystique of fine art. The 1983 BBC-2 documentary on Brandt² exemplified this: the artist was shown leafing through a book of his work, chatting to an unseen expert. As each picture was discussed it came on to the full screen. There was no need to explain what made these photos different from snapshots or posters. Art photography is premised on the idea that the artist has a special 'vision', and need only record it with his camera.

Modern criticism has redefined painting and

¹ *Shadows from Light*, directed by Steve Dwoskin, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1984. Televised on Channel 4, March 23, 1984.

² *Master Photographer: Bill Brandt*, BBC-2, 1983.

sculpture in generous terms – roughly, as mark-making; and one of the underlying themes of modern art has been to present its components as primary materials, rather than as tools with which to represent a subject.

Although fine art is an economic category of cultural production as a whole, into which any medium may enter by observing the ground-rules, the effect of presenting photographs as such is to ignore the significance that photography has in society which the traditional media no longer have.

Shadows from Light does set out to be something other than a conventional Arts documentary. It does not depend on the authority of the expert mediator and invisible camera, nor does it pretend that the camera can make a direct record of another medium. Dwoskin takes his method and construction from his subject matter: he uses surrealism as both an interpretative device and as a documentary structure. The camera movement around the static photos is a constant reminder of its presence and the placing of the photos in their 'real' settings demonstrates the existence of the

photos as objects in the world. Despite this, the film does not attempt to look at the implications of its own reading of Brandt's work. A documentary inevitably tends to one viewpoint or another, but Dwoskin's treatment of some parts of Brandt's work is marked by his omission of those photographs which do not allow a surrealist reading – the photojournalism with which he made his name in the '30s.

Brandt's work progressed through a number of different categories, in both its use and intention. He started as an unpaid assistant in Man Ray's Paris studio, and he cites this period and his contact with surrealist artists at that time as his greatest inspiration. Subsequently, during the '30s, he worked on popular photo-journals such as *Picture Post*, *News Chronicle* and *Weekly Illustrated*. He also illustrated an edition of *The Road to Wigan Pier* for the Left Book Club, and produced books of his own. After a War spent as an official photographer of the London bombings, he worked largely on the nudes on which Dwoskin concentrates. (The nudes suited the market for luxuriance and escapist images in the years of post-War scarcity. The genre also



Bill Brandt in *Shadows from Light*; a visible camera, but invisible assumptions about photography.

established Brandt as an 'artist'.) Brandt collaborated with writer John Hayward on *Literary Britain*, illustrating a number of passages about the British landscape. And throughout his career he undertook commissioned portraits of the literary and artistic establishment.

The photographers with whom Brandt has been compared, such as Atget and Brassai, and by whom it has been suggested he was influenced reveal only superficial similarities. Atget worked from a personal obsession, and within the economic framework of providing '*documents pour artistes*'. Brassai constructed a particular image of Paris, suggesting a hidden *demi-monde* to be revealed only in the momentary light of the flash. Conversely, Brandt's images are consciously calculated to evoke a nostalgic, half-remembered past: 'I feel that I have been to a place long ago, and must try to recapture what I remember.'³

His book *The English at Home* creates a fictional 'Englishness', in which even the most uncompromising pictures of bleak northern towns in the '30s lack political potency and direction. They convey a certain pathos but do not demand change. Remarkably few of these photos show people at work (the 'coal pickers' and occasional others are exceptions). The fish porter seems posed for the decorative elements of the composition rather than to put his heavy load and bloody overall in a working environment. A grimy northern interior is cosy rather than squalid. Rather than anger or dignity, these anonymous portraits suggest an accepted order of things which accords with the commissioned portraits. There artists, writers and celebrities are posed to confirm their acknowledged success.

In the introduction to Brandt's book of 'portraits' Alan Ross writes: 'There are no wind-bag politicians here, no bureaucrats, no cliché-mouthing trades unionists or show-biz "personalities"'. This is debatable as fact, but perfectly reasonable in terms of how the photos look. Brandt's subjects lean against old walls, wander in the garden or sit in the comfortable ~ houses of the middle class. To these reassuring props of Englishness, Brandt adds a facile edge of surrealist disquiet through lighting or a

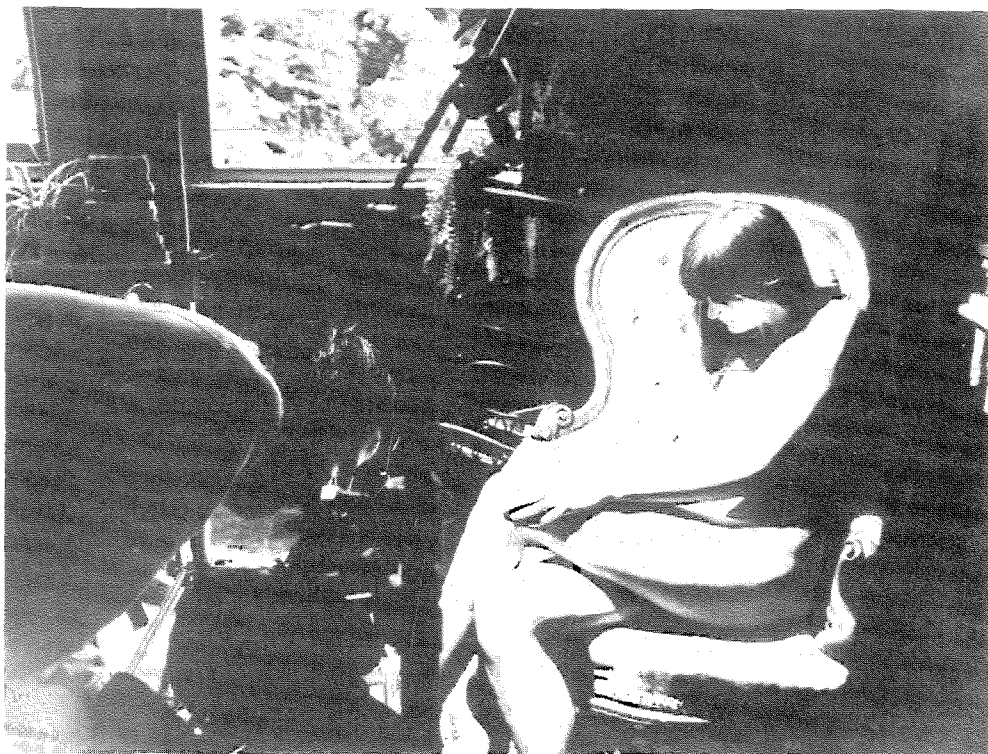
strange object, thus flattering both the mind and body of his subjects. He shows them as both part of the English tradition, and as contemporary. Even in the less conventional portraits Brandt's photos are limited. A surreal image of grossly magnified eyes communicates little without the knowledge that these are the eyes of a great painter. The argument of these photos is not that the eye of an artist is physically different from that of a mere mortal – although that is suggested – but that the subject enjoys a particular cultural status. S/he is confirmed by the photo as part of that 'special' group of people, and so by implication is the photographer.

In *Shadows from Light* Brandt is heard to say that he had originally wanted to photograph rooms, but empty rooms were 'no good' without nudes to 'give space'. He was using an old wide-angle lens camera, with the idea of emulating the interior shots in *Citizen Kane*, and he explains that the early nudes were distorted accidentally as there was so little image on the ground glass of this antique camera that he was virtually working blind.

The premise of artistic representations of naked women is that the woman is somehow transformed into a neutral form, the nude. It is arguable whether this is ever more than a fiction, especially in photography. Pornography is probably one of the most economically significant areas in the photography industry, and the arty nude is central to photography as fine art. In social and political terms it is hard to differentiate between the two, but Brandt's photos of nudes are at the heart of Dwoskin's film and also Brandt's reputation as an artist.

Brandt's surrealist approach rarely takes him far away from the clichés of pornography. Many of his pictures epitomise the violence and depersonalisation that porn contributes to representations of women. What might be called Brandt's eroticism of distortion involves photos of women bound and cut up: if it is an alternative erotica it implies a disturbing view of women; even the well-known beach photos show twisted bodies and what look like amputated limbs. However, Brandt picks the nudes as his favourite photos, and in terms of form and convention they are Brandt's most innovative photos. The Page Three punter would probably reject these photos; they do not present the women as 'desirable' and do not engage in the 'dialogue' of that kind of porn. Nonetheless, to a

³ Quoted in Aaron Scharf's introduction to *Bill Brandt*, Arts Council Exhibition Catalogue, London, 1970.



Unsafe subject matter? An anonymous actress portrays a Brandt nude.

considerable extent the social implications of these photographs are obscured by the kind of critical consideration that Art invites.

Michael Hiley writes of Brandt's nudes with the authority of an establishment art critic: 'The nudes are the medium but not the whole message. . . . When we look at Brandt's nudes we can see that he has worked on unsafe subject matter, touching on raw nerve ends, trespassing into forbidden areas.'⁴

This goes to the centre of the reading of these photos as art. Surrealism makes a political claim – that rendering the forbidden visible is in itself a revolutionary act; that representations can stand as statements without any ulterior context or analysis apart from that offered by the discourse of fine art. In practice, when radical work is included in the fine art discourse it is defused by that context. The nude is not a dangerous area for the artist but a traditional one. If Brandt's work is unsafe, it is because he comes so near to pornography that his work has

the effect of shocking the art establishment.

Although Dwoskin's treatment of the female nude purports to be a filmic version of Brandt's constructions, it is significantly different. Dwoskin animates Brandt's semi-abstract nudes and shows naked women wandering in rooms decorated by Brandt's prints, which are themselves altered and distorted by the film. Such a strategy explicitly relates Brandt's constructions to 'real' women. It distinctly argues that the distorted and fragmented bodies of the prints are those of living people, not the inanimate forms that Michael Hiley described. Yet Dwoskin's models do not turn and speak; they simply leave the room, to return a little later. (At the end of the film they are credited as 'Cosey' and 'Daisy'.) The elements of Brandt's photography that can be read as male fantasy are thus confirmed by the film.

Shadows from Light takes Brandt's nudes as its central subject and concentrates on the surrealist 'art' reading. A film-maker in 1983 makes a conscious choice to use or to ignore the feminist discussion of sexuality, and Dwoskin ignores it. The result appears curiously dated. The

⁴ Michael Hiley, introduction to *Bill Brandt: Nudes*, Gordon Fraser, London, 1980.

112 nostalgic Victorian props and casual nudity seem hung over from the '60s. A prop in a photo is fixed in time by the photographic moment; but a film camera moving through a room full of objects from the past denies their authenticity: we read film as fiction. Objects work differently in cinema than in photos, and rather than bringing the moments of Brandt's photos to life, Dwoskin's film makes the 'atmospheres' look strained and awkward.

Cinematic surrealism works best when it turns a recognisable reality upside down. But what is recognised (and not inverted) in *Shadows from Light* is the received currency of surrealist symbolism, Brandt's photographs as such (the 'originals') and the parallel of the film's 'journey'. In carefully recreating their 'atmospheres', Dwoskin paradoxically obscures the meaning of the photographs. His film mystifies their function as objects in society as much as any conventional documentary.

The relationship of these photographs to any pattern of dreaming beyond individual memories is slight: the surrealist constructions that Brandt uses look superficial. Dwoskin does not have a structural equivalent in his film, and instead uses

vague analogies such as the Carroll quotations which suggest little about the photos and have no substance by themselves. Photography is an effective surrealist mode because it can bring things together in time. Both film and dreams are based on a distortion of time, but *Shadows from Light*'s avoidance of narrative neither creates a dream world nor relates to the real time of the viewer. It remains illustrative and no more.

The word 'atmosphere' is central to both Brandt's photos and Dwoskin's film. Atmosphere suggests the accidental: that a photographer happened to see it, or happened to be at the right place at the right time to 'capture' it. But the 'atmosphere' is the most subjective interpretative device of all, because it has no concrete existence. The word exactly describes the hidden construction of these photos.

In *Shadows from Light* this 'atmosphere' remains unchallenged. Indeed it is deliberately heightened by the scripted voice-over: a text that points to a particular reading. Just as in the BBC's *Master Photographers* series, the photographs remain unanalysed, while the film tells us yet again what to look for.

LETTERS

From Philip Schlesinger, School of Social Sciences, Thames Polytechnic, Wellington Street, London SE18; and Graham Murdock, Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, 104 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7LT:

Ian Connell's review of our book, *Televising 'Terrorism': Political Violence in Popular Culture*¹, demands a reply, however brief. In general, we think, when you write a book you should take your chances on hostile criticism. But when a critic completely fails to convey the substance of the argument and compounds the offence by riding his own hobby horse to irrelevance and distortion, then the record needs putting straight. In most cases one could probably not do so. *Screen*, however, does offer such an opportunity, and it seems particularly worthwhile taking it up, given the debate about Left analysis of the media which is presently going on in your pages. Ian, we fear, betrays many of the manifestations of a closed mind: but perhaps he might begin to think again.

We don't want to offer a long rebuttal. We want to inform *Screen*'s readers of what we intended. First, however, it seems necessary to replace the distorting lenses of Ian's spectacles, for wearing those he could not do other than misread our book, and produce the resulting caricature published in the last issue.

What is at the root of Connell's Complaint? Fortunately, the malady is a simple one to diagnose: he has read the book through the wrong conceptual grid. Very properly in his own current work, so we gather, he is concerned with the important problem of how audiences interpret television. He accuses us of having little to offer on this score when it comes to how the audience reads representations of 'terrorism'. But is that so surprising, given that our book is *not* about audiences and their interpretations? It is, *inter alia*, about the organisation and determinants of a range of discourses on television. As for what audiences make of these ... well, we have our hunches, but remain properly agnostic, and say so quite explicitly on

page 167, should our critic care to read the concluding chapter.

Ian's sad confusion engenders yet another. He takes us to task, with a note of schoolmasterly asperity, for not analysing the complexities of 'popular culture'. He does not define what he means here, but it's apparent that he intends the beliefs and modes of cultural consumption prevalent amongst the working class. Error indeed, but not ours, we fear. Connell's Complaint is at work again, for one *idée fixe* leads to another. When we refer to 'political violence in popular culture' in our subtitle we intend programmes with mass audiences amongst the range of those analysed. So the reference is to television as a system of distribution rather than to a sociology of tastes.

The exquisite concentration on our alleged shortcomings as 'content analysts' somewhat detracts from the way in which *Televising 'Terrorism'* offers both a political intervention and also a certain recasting of how to problematise the field. Since Ian declines to inform *Screen*'s readership about these, let us do so with a few remarks.

First of all, we chose the theme 'terrorism' because the problems of televisual representation which it engenders are of paramount importance. Political violence raises questions about the practice of liberal democracy, not least the use of anti-terrorist repression, which goes well beyond the more customary focus on parliamentary politics and industrial relations. So Ian is rather reductionist to lump all these together. We not only offer an account of how television represents 'terrorism', but also an account of how 'terrorism' is analysed in current political discourse.

Ian's main worry here seems to be that we have 'found' in television's representations that which we already knew from our reconstruction of the debate. This throws a rather strange light upon his own practice of research. He seems to have made an elementary confusion between the context of discovery and the context of justification. When you *present* an argument, it usually does take a linear form. In this case: 'Here are four perspectives on "terrorism" – the official, alternative, reactionary populist and oppositional – let's see how these work in television's discourses, both factual and fictional.' But we did not *discover* the existence of these perspectives just like that. There was an

¹ Published by Comedia, London, 1983. Reviewed in *Screen*, March-April 1984, vol 25 no 2, pp 76-79.

114 extensive job of reconstruction from a range of sources including parliamentary speeches, press conferences, academic and other conferences, confidential documentation. Readers of our earlier versions² will see that references to 'populism' were there, but needed explicating further. So there was a dialectical process of theorising and empirical research at work, not the use of a Procrustean bed.

Second, Ian completely ignores the civil libertarian purposes which inform the book. It is, after all, an argument *against censorship* which is at the core of it. Reading his review, you might think that this was purely beside the point; he certainly doesn't talk about it. Again, as we say explicitly in our preface, our aim is to sustain the possibility of rational debate about political violence, and we see it as essential to support a commitment to a public sphere in which such debate can occur. This stance, which informs the critique of official thinking—especially the chapter devoted to taking apart counter-insurgency ideology—evidently merits no discussion. And yet, surely it is plain enough that identical pro-censorship arguments are constantly being reiterated, not just about 'terrorism', but currently about 'video-nasties' and 'violence' in general.

Apart from exposing the feeble intellectual bases of such arguments our book is also directed against a certain *simplicism* presently rampant on the Left. This derives from taking the 'closed', limited form of news as the paradigm case for the analysis of broadcasting with a consequent failure to recognise the potentialities afforded by other forms. If you want a current manifestation of this you could do no better than read Tony

Benn's column in the *Guardian*, where, at least half a dozen times since losing his seat, he has recycled his impoverished conspiracy theory about the media reporting of the Left. He has been joined in this by E P Thompson, who also argues that 'they are completely against us' when talking about media coverage of the anti-nuclear movement. Now here, one might have thought, Ian would have recognised allies in his own critique of Thompson's style of misreading³. For has he not argued that quite a range of perspectives and arguments may be transmitted in anti-nuclear coverage? In this regard he too evidently disputes the Left pessimism we have identified. Alas, Connell's Complaint seems to induce amnesia as well as conceptual displacement. Or maybe he has not forgotten his argument, just silently disposed of it? It would be interesting to know.

Much of our book is involved in elaborating this case further. Thus, we argue that the focus should shift away from news, or just actuality alone, to take in fictional forms too. And we have devised a form of classification which allows us to pick out similarities and differences in programme formats across these two broad areas of programming. So, we argue, news and action-adventure series are similar in the ways they operate as 'closed' forms (privileging official viewpoints) whereas authored documentaries and one-off plays contain the potentiality for 'openness' (permitting alternative and oppositional viewpoints to find voice). For Ian, we merely allege diversity rather than demonstrate it. Well, readers, judge for yourselves.

In producing this kind of situated analysis we have tried to shift the argument on the Left from blanket condemnation of broadcasting as an institution to a recognition of the spaces within broadcasting's output where 'fairer' representations are potentially, and sometimes actually, available. Could one doubt this is needed? The Labour Party, for instance, disastrously failed to support the innovatory potential of Channel Four, facilitating the rolling back which has gone on ever since November 1982, and the use it made of television during the last election was scandalously unimaginative and self-destructive.⁴

These dimensions of the book—whether right

² 'The State and "Terrorism" on British Television', *L'Immagine dell'Uomo*, no 1, January 1982. An abridged version has been published as '"Terrorism" and the State: A Case Study of the Discourses of Television', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol 5 no 2, April 1983.

³ Ian Connell, 'Peace in our Times?' in Crispin Aubrey (ed), *Nukespeak: The Media and the Bomb*, London, Comedia, 1982.

⁴ For comments on both these points see Philip Schlesinger, Richard Paterson and Mairéde Thomas, 'Defending Channel Four', *New Socialist* no 10, March/April 1983 and Philip Schlesinger, 'Election Coverage on TV and Radio', *the Listener*, June 23, 1983.

or wrong in argument – are ignored by Ian's review. Instead, we are identified as 'content analysts' who make excessive claims for their method. Certainly, roughly one third of the book engages in textual analyses of programmes, but it's pushing things a bit to say that this is a 'content analysis'. And, as we hope we have managed to indicate, the textual analysis is harnessed to wider purposes, not done for its own sake. It is for this reason that a methodological critique alone, which is all that Ian offers, fails to grapple with the political and theoretical interventions in which we have engaged.

From Steve Neale, for the Executive Committee of the Society for Education in Film and Television, 29 Old Compton Street, London W1:

The bulk of film teaching in this country both at Secondary and Tertiary levels and in Adult Education is dependent upon, and organised around, the availability of 16mm prints. While the Education Department at the British Film Institute is currently investigating the availability (and more crucially the non-availability) of certain titles, and attempting to determine the extent to which the availability of 16mm prints has been affected by the distribution of films on video, SEFT is launching a parallel survey concentrating less on availability as such than on the condition of those 16mm prints which are in current circulation.

Those of us involved in teaching have all tended from time to time to have booked prints which are unsatisfactory for a possible variety of reasons. If a print is scratched or worn or warped, it may be difficult to project and/or image quality may be especially poor, and this may have a direct bearing on what one is trying to teach. Analysis of directorial style and *mise-en-scène* can be difficult if a print is in bad condition! Perhaps more crucially, a print may be so bad that sections of the film may be missing, having had to be removed if sprocket holes have been damaged, or if the film has repeatedly snapped. There used, for instance, to

Finally, we are saddened, and disappointed, that in a review of some 2000 words, Ian could not find a kind word to say about our late friend, colleague and collaborator, Philip Elliott. Philip felt this book to have been the most important he had been associated with. It is a great tragedy that he did not live to see it published. Whether Ian found his work in general unworthy of mention we cannot say, although we know that Philip was well-regarded both in Britain and elsewhere. It is ungenerous to pass over the death of a formative figure in the field of media studies and cultural sociology in Britain by a deafening silence.

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be a particularly poor 16mm copy of *Shock Corridor* in circulation, from which large chunks were missing. (Now, unfortunately, there is no print in circulation at all.) Finally, prints may be in circulation which are unsatisfactory for other reasons: there may only exist black and white copies of colour films (Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession* comes to mind); or copies which are several minutes shorter than the running time of the original release print (here, coincidentally, John Stahl's version of *Magnificent Obsession* is a good example); or standard ratio versions of wide-screen films (nearly all the early sixties epics – *Spartacus*, *El Cid*, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* – are only available on 16mm in standard ration, making it virtually impossible either to study the genre or to study the films of Anthony Mann as auteur).

SEFT would like to collate information on all prints in current circulation which for one reason or another are defective, in order then to put pressure on those distributors responsible for handling the prints. If you have come across defective 16mm prints during the course of teaching (or studying) film, or indeed in other educational contexts, please write to us letting us know the title of the film, its current distributor, and the nature of your complaint about the print. If the response is sufficient, we shall in a future edition of *Screen* publish the results of our survey and report on any progress made with the distributors concerned.

I should like to make some observations in response to Julian Petley's account of the construction of a moral panic over 'video nasties' (*Screen* March-April, 1984, vol 25 no 2).

While the Video Recordings Bill has secured an easy passage through Parliament on the back of the 'nasties' scare, debate on the Bill in particular and on censorship in general has been, in quantity and in quality, quite abysmal. It now seems, as Julian Petley points out, that we shall be saddled with legislation which calls for thoroughgoing, State-backed and centralised, prior censorship of virtually all video recordings offered for sale or hire in this country. This seems not a little excessive in light of the fact that the alleged objects of this fresh enthusiasm for regulating representations constitute only a very small proportion of all the material soon to be subject to censorship. The whole business, as it turns out, has little to do with the 'video nasties' which served as its justification.

The role of the 'nasties' panic in rendering publicly acceptable an extremely stringent system of precensorship is now becoming clearer. Arguments central to moral panics of this type about, for example, the special vulnerability and moral corruptibility of children, are extremely difficult to counter, however: in any case 'video nasties' and their putative effects are not, as I have suggested, the real point at issue. This is why I believe that engaging with the moral panic on its own terms is not now likely to be productive in constructing a credible opposition to censorship. There are two good reasons, certainly as far as readers of *Screen* will be concerned, for shifting the debate onto different terrain: feminism, and independent cinema.

Such questioning as there has been of the 'nasties' scare loses a good deal of credibility when it speaks from a libertarian position which takes no account whatever of ten or fifteen years of feminist thinking and action around representation. To ignore the possibility that there may indeed be a problem about how women are portrayed in 'video nasties' seems, in 1984, irresponsible and self-defeating. An anti-censorship lobby which, in its eagerness quite correctly to condemn the moral panic, tries to

sweep this inconvenient fact under the carpet, makes a big mistake.

That opposition to the Video Recordings Bill has been so muted hitherto does in fact suggest that many libertarians feel uneasy about the representation of women in some video recordings, and – while not welcoming the censorship of that material – hesitate to argue publicly for its continued circulation. There is actually good reason to suppose that those responsible for the drafting and promotion of the Bill welcomed what they called feminist arguments because these effectively silenced whatever libertarian opposition there might otherwise have been to their efforts.

If this has had unfortunate consequences, it is not feminism itself which is to blame, but rather the unprincipled and partial appropriation of its arguments. It really is about time the distinct contribution of feminist thought to debates on representation were properly recognised for what it is, and not harnessed to the causes of those who find it convenient to bolster their essentially prefeminist – and quite possibly antifeminist – positions with okay-sounding references to the 'degradation of women' and suchlike. It is important, in other words, that differences between feminist and moralist positions on representation should be more widely understood and acknowledged. Such an understanding must be a *sine qua non* of any acceptable opposition to censorship in the 1980s.

Briefly, while feminists might agree with moralists that certain representations are harmful, most would disagree on the question of which representations are harmful, in what way, and what should be done about it. From a feminist standpoint, the harm lies in the construction and recirculation of beliefs about women, femininity and female sexuality which impose unproductive and limiting models on half of the population. Harm of this sort is obviously not confined to sexually violent or pornographic material in 'video nasties' and elsewhere, but constructs a wide range of representations, most of which are public, visible, and socially acceptable.

Consequently, since the problem does not hinge on a circumscribed category of representations, feminists have nothing in common with moralists who seek legal restrictions on particular types of material. For

feminists, the harm is deep-rooted and pervasive, objections to it have nothing to do with moralism, and the law is not an appropriate means of dealing with it. The harm, at root, is but one expression of a patriarchal culture: the law, at present, is another. I for one eagerly await the day when law and patriarchy go their separate ways, but the passing of a Video Recordings Act seems unlikely to herald that particular new dawn.

Meanwhile, in securing the restriction and regulation of most video recordings the new Bill may actually operate against feminist and other oppositional interventions in representation and cultural production. Independent video makers, and independent film-makers who want to make their work available on video—a group which includes women and men, feminists and possibly even non-feminists—will need to acquaint themselves with the requirements of the Video Recordings Bill. Basically, all video recordings supplied by way of sale or hire 'for reward' are to be subject to prior censorship and classification, on penalty for failure to comply of a fine of £2000. There are limited exemptions to this requirement, including material designed to provide 'information, education or instruction' or 'concerned with sport, religion or music'. None of the exemptions apply, however, when a work deals with sexual material of certain kinds, or with acts of 'gross violence'. Much depends, of course, on how the terms of the Bill, and the passages quoted above in particular, are interpreted. To what extent, for instance, is a distribution organisation such as, say, Cinema of Women in business for reward on the one hand, or education on the other?

It is quite likely, nevertheless, that some at least of the work of independent film and video makers will fall within the scope of the new legislation. This would mean that producers will have to submit their work for classification to a State-appointed censorship body—probably an expanded British Board of Film Censors—at a

cost of several hundreds of pounds and more than likely months of delay. Not a bright prospect, at a not very rosy moment, for the future of independent oppositional film and video in Britain.

There is no doubt, however, that work dealing with the non-exempt areas listed in Section 2(2) of the Bill will fall within its scope. An independent feminist production with which I was involved provides an interesting case in point. A series commissioned for Channel Four's *Eleventh Hour* slot and recently televised (*Pictures of Women—Sexuality*) included a programme on pornography which will, I imagine, need to be certificated, on grounds that it includes some 'non-exempt' material, if the production group wishes to distribute videotapes of it for use by women's groups, colleges, union branches, etc. Assuming that the producers could in the first place afford the substantial fee likely to be involved, if the video were to be given at '18' certificate it would then be out of the reach of an important section of its target audience.

Although it may be too late now to stop the passage of this legislation, all this does suggest that a better-informed debate about censorship and its implications is now urgently called for, a debate which genuinely takes on board feminist thinking on representation. It suggests also that the time is at hand for the independent film and video lobby to attempt to get some of the terms of the Video Recordings Bill clarified in its favour, and the exemptions broadened, so that censorship does not render a social practice of cinema even more difficult than it already is.

From Broadside, 74 Moss Lane, Pinner, Middlesex:

Your readers might like to know that although our current affairs series for Channel Four has been 'discontinued' (Carl Gardner and Julie Sheppard: 'Transforming Television' in *Screen* March-April, 1984, vol 25 no 2) Broadside still exists as an independent production company.